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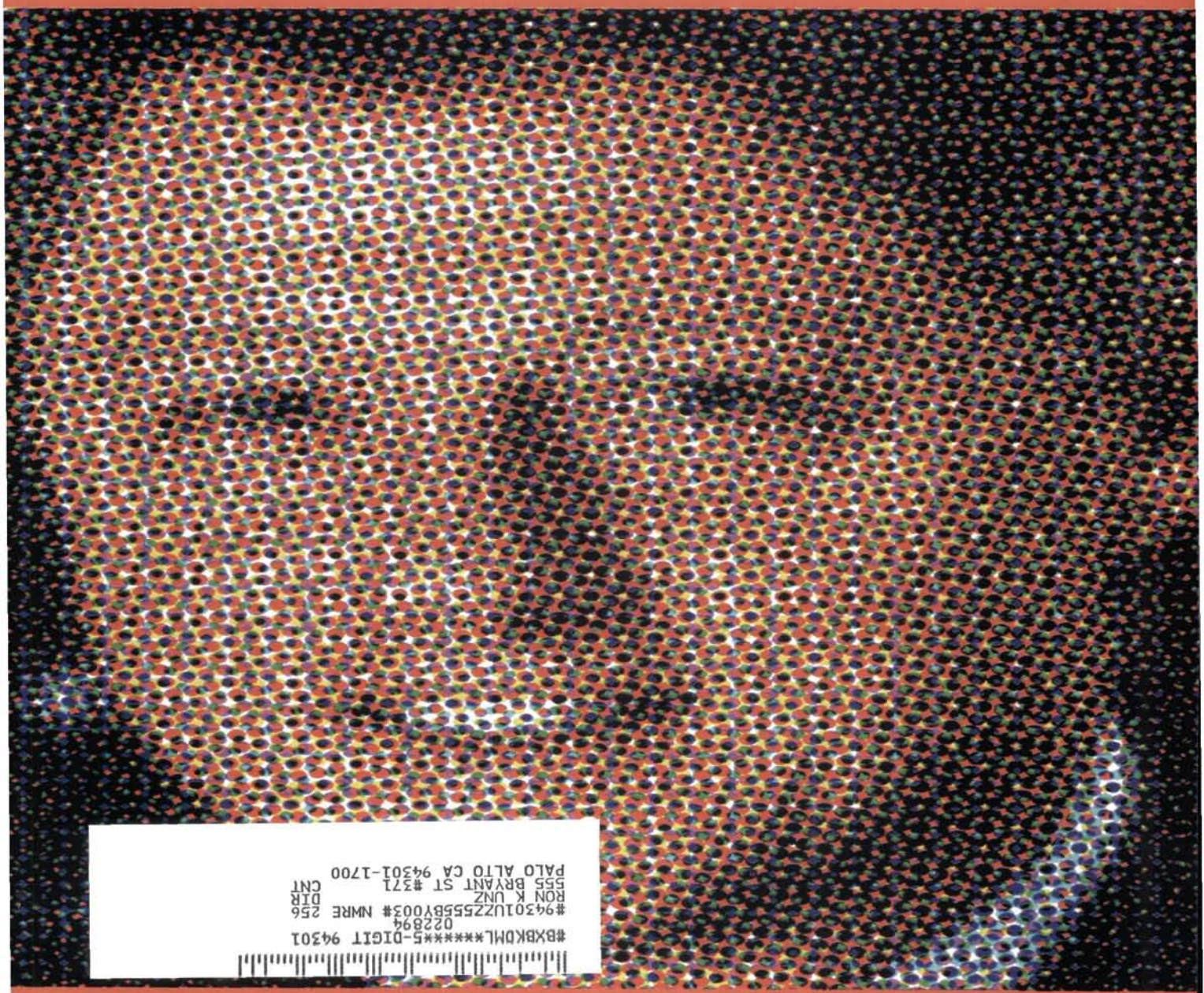

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NOTES TOWARD A DEFINITION OF CLINTONISM
BY LEON WIESELTIER

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JULY 19 & 26, 1993

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WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUES 4,096 & 4,097

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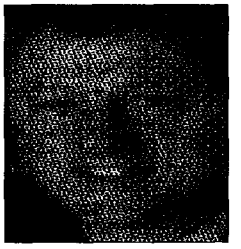

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 209, Numbers 3 & 4, Issues 4,096 & 4,097, July 19 & 26, 1993. (Printed in the U.S. on June 30, 1993.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 4 & 11, July 19 & 26, Aug. 23 & 30, and Sept. 20 & 27, 1993) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. The New Republic/National Review joint advertising (212) 702-4882. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling).

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(ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Internet mail address: TNR@aol.com. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 602, Mount Morris, IL 61054. For subscription problems call 800-827-1289.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Due justice

To the editors:

I was astonished and dismayed to learn that TNR had floated my name as a potential nominee to head the civil rights division of the Justice Department ("The Road from Nowhere," June 28). I am utterly lacking in relevant qualifications and background—a description, sadly, that characterizes too many who have recently served in that position.

It's high time that we learned to treat civil rights law the way was treat antitrust and criminal prosecution: leave it to the experts. Her expertise and experience would have made Lani Guinier fantastic at the job. But perhaps expertise and experience are not what Washington wants.

STEPHEN CARTER
Yale Law School
New Haven, Connecticut

Ethnic entities

To the editors:

Several years ago, in a still peaceful and cosmopolitan Sarajevo and in the course of a supposedly academic debate about the future of Bosnia, one of my former professors told me that I had no right to discuss the Bosnian national problems since I was a nationally unconscious nonentity, a product of a long history of intermarriages in my family and further deranged by the superficial American education in political science.

My professor went on to become an adviser to one of the "warring parties," as American media like to call Serbs, Muslims and Croats. I came back to America to continue my "superficial" studies of democracy. But as John J. Mearsheimer and Robert A. Pape's article ("The Answer," June 14) has showed, my professor was not alone in thinking that opinions and even lives of nonentities were worthless. Mearsheimer and Pape's elaborate proposal for the partition of Bosnia—with its population exchanges guaranteed by the international community—means a virtual annihilation of all such nonentities, of all the people who refuse to think that the rights of the group should be held superior to the rights of an individual. And this is the real issue in this war—the fact that people like my professor have forced millions of people to see themselves first and foremost as ethnic entities.

As I write this letter, the partition of Bosnia may be on the way to becoming a sad reality. But the acknowledgment of such a pitiful situation in one of the places with the longest record of ethnic tolerance in the world should not be taken as a pretext for prescriptive and normative statements on ethnic homogenization. The political and symbolic consequences of such "solutions" should be recognized by those of us who still have the luxury of living in multicultural societies.

I found it particularly ironic that this article appeared in the same issue in which you accused Lani Guinier of promoting racial polarization, of dividing America into "*us*" and "*them*" for attempting to equalize voting opportunities. Perhaps Mearsheimer and Pape could take the vacant position in the Justice Department and apply the Bosnian solution to this country. We would all end up in an ever-so-peaceful racially segregated America with no—God forbid—Lani Guiniers and similar nonentities. For in such an America, Lani Guinier's parents would never have met.

Or perhaps the division of the people into entities and nonentities applies only to those lunatics in the Balkans?

AIDA HOZIC
Charlottesville, Virginia

Sanctified screed

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus missed the point when he portrayed the Leonard Jeffries case entirely in terms of free-speech rights ("Speech Defect," TRB, June 14). The issue with Jeffries is not his right to say what he does, but his competence to do so.

Jeffries's racist ideas are significant because they are spoken by a tenured professor. Yet he has never even tried to bolster those ideas with the trappings of academic discourse. He has published very little on any subject. He has offered no evidence to support his claims concerning Jewish influence in the film industry. His statements about "ice people" and "sun people" seem based merely on his own imagination.

Have universities suffered such a loss of perspective that they cannot distinguish between legitimate (if possibly erroneous) proposals and unsubstantiated garbage? Are a professor's First Amendment rights violated when it is pointed out that he or she fails to meet even minimal academic standards?

BRIAN DIRCK
Olathe, Kansas

Facts and fibbers

To the editors:

In "Fibbers" (June 21), Katherine Dunn maligned the work of an anti-violence group in Portland, Oregon. I am a member of the Homophobic Violence Reporting Line, which is not a "record-a-phone" but rather a volunteer-run community group that has been active since 1991. No one in our group was contacted by Dunn.

Dunn called into question our policy of letting those who call our line define for themselves how they have experienced violence and how it has impacted them. Our advertisements read: "Gays and Lesbians: Have you been hurt, harassed, intimidated, threatened, discriminated against? Report the violence and get support." This policy recognizes that getting vicious notes left in your mailbox at home can have as devastating an effect as being attacked physically. When Dunn states that the harassing phone calls and verbal threats that constitute the majority of reports to our line "are illegal but not violent," I wonder what her definition of violence is, if blood or death is necessary, and why her definition is better than anyone else's.

To address some specific points of misinformation, we do not include in our reports counts of seeing pro-Measure 9 buttons or T-shirts, as Dunn claims, but we will listen to anyone who calls to talk about the climate of hate and fear that these things create. Another issue that was emphasized at the press conference but apparently missed by Dunn's source was that the raw numbers that we collect are meaningless without a baseline, especially given that homophobic violence is one of the most underreported types of crime. We stressed that the information we compile from the calls to our line can reveal information about the quality of our environment, the types of violence that are occurring and trends that happen within a period of consistent operations. It is exactly this sort of valuable information that is missed when the work of an organization gets summarily dismissed by an ill-informed commentator.

LUCY BERNARD
Portland, Oregon

To the editors:

Katherine Dunn had the good intention of warning journalists not to run with a secondhand story without checking it out. She then ignores her own advice by attacking the campaign by Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting for more coverage of domestic violence without confirming the charges made by her single source, *The Washington Post*'s Ken Ringle.

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This is particularly unfortunate when Ringle's coverage of this story was taken to task almost two months ago by the *American Journalism Review.*

One more time for the record: FAIR did not claim that statistical studies had shown that Super Bowl Sunday was "the biggest day of the year for violence against women." What FAIR said, in a statement sent to hundreds of journalists two weeks before Ringle's article, was that "women's shelters report that Super Bowl Sunday is also one of the worst days of the year for violence against women in the home." We then cited mainstream press accounts that backed up these reports. We did not cite academic studies because, to the best of our knowledge, no academic research has been done on this issue.

JIM NAURECKAS
Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting
New York, New York

Katherine Dunn replies:

To answer Lucy Bernard, I define "violence" as a threatening or injurious use of force. The 1992 Anti-Gay/Lesbian Violence Report does count incidents of "theft of No on 9 lawn signs," anti-lesbian/gay "graffiti" and "buttons," "stickers" and "T-shirts"; in fact, the majority of incidents included are verbal rather than physical. Labeling these as violence is, at best, a metaphor. Moreover, daily newspaper reports and eyewitnesses do not support Bernard's statement that her group stressed "the raw numbers ... are meaningless without a baseline." My source says the group stressed that their numbers were more significant than those of police or other reporting sources.

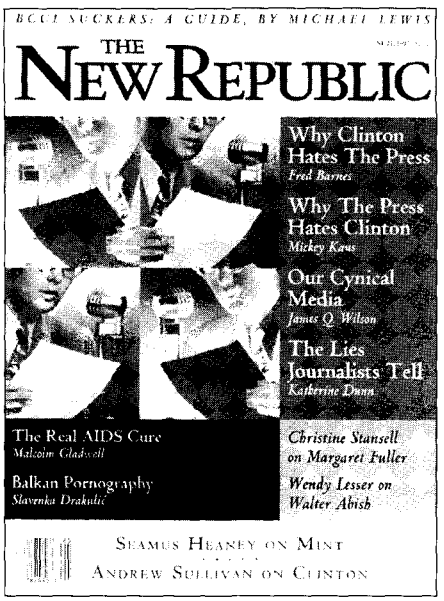
It's interesting that Jim Naureckas of FAIR cites the *American Journalism Review* article by Jean Cobb, since Cobb comes to this conclusion: "So it appears Ringle is correct: If there is any 'hard evidence' of a rise [in Super Bowl related violence], no one has come forward with this data."

Fuel for thought

To the editors:

I have been hired to appraise coal mines, oil and gas fields and geothermal steam fields, an experience that suggests serious problems inherent in both the equity and administration of a BTU tax ("Energy Taxes, Please," June 21). In regard to equity, you say that energy as a cost of production is "about 5 percent on the average," but this casually conceals energy costs three to four times that much in the aluminum, cement and steel industries.

Consider the multiple benefits of an increased transportation-fuels (not just gasoline) tax, other than, as you noted, an "incentive for drivers to get their gas-guzzlers off the road or to carpool to work." First, a transportation-fuels tax is very broadly based, because everyone is affected by a tax that is levied on fuel for cars, trucks, buses, trains and planes. Second, such a tax is easily administered, because only a few products—gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel, et al.—are employed, and their producers and distributors are well-known and are already paying taxes. Third, it would increase use of cash-short public transportation, lessen urban air pollution, bring about fewer fender-benders and lower insurance rates. Not to mention the salient fact that an added ten cents per gallon



is $4.20 per barrel, a notable disincentive to OPEC to raise the price of oil.

ROBERT H. PASCHALL
Bishop, California

Type casting

To the editors:

Like any large bureaucracy, the U.N. will have flaws that make it easy to kid about, as even we who must think of it as humanity's last best hope must admit. But Simon Worral ("Reverting to Type," June 28) should have known that its "Commission on Truth" not only is not ominous, but represents an entity that gave us a landmark contribution to human rights and the rule of law in the world. Created under agreement between the government of El Salvador and the opposing rebel coalition, the Truth Commission should be better remembered for its exposé of the many crimes of the Salvador military and U.S. complicity. "Never again, never forget" are phrases that are of multiple applicability."

HOWARD N. MEYER
New York, New York

Demeaning of meaning

To the editors:

First, I commend TNR for reprinting Michael Lerner's letter (Correspondence, June 28). Second, Lerner accuses said magazine of cynicism; a popular rebuttal for those who disagree with us. In fact, TNR showed skepticism, not cynicism. There is, of course, a big difference. To be skeptical is to question the validity of a fact; to be cynical is to assume that selfishness motivates human activity.

Michael Lerner's letter makes me skeptical. He claims that reporters like Michael Kelly are cynically trying to paint Hillary Clinton and himself as elitists who know better than the masses how to bring about a "new politics of meaning."

Lerner writes: "The goal of government is not to impose or shape a community of meaning, but to eliminate the existing economic, social and governmental obstacles to the realization of those desires that exist among so many Americans." Is he asking government to eliminate government? He might as well assume the postal service will make money this year.

Again, Lerner writes: "In a society that already tilts toward selfishness, we may need a governmental affirmative action program for policies that tend to encourage cooperation, caring for others, moral and ecological sensitivity and empathy." So you see, government will eliminate government with another government. Given the federal bureaucracy's track record, I find my skepticism slowly evolving to cynicism.

CHARLES G. MCGUIRE
Dallas, Texas

To the editors:

For those who, even after his letter, *still* need help understanding Michael Lerner's ethos of human caring and love (as opposed to inhuman caring and love), I offer the following meaning of the mean(der)ing of his letter to the editor:

> You're so mean. You should change your mien. It's demeaning. We have the means not to be mean. Know what I mean?
> Yours, M. Lerner, Director, Ministry of Love, Washington, D.C. (District of Caring)

Hope that helped.

ORLAND OUTLAND
San Francisco, California

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FROM WASHINGTON

Room to move

"There's never been a better time to run as a Republican," Representative Bill Paxon, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, told my colleague Fred Barnes recently ("Right Back," July 5). Didn't a Republican win the open Texas Senate seat with 67 percent of the vote? Meanwhile, direct-mail fund-raisers are sucking record sums out of right-wing wallets. Rush Limbaugh has 16 million listeners. More people subscribe to *The American Spectator* than THE NEW REPUBLIC. Anti-Clintonism, writes Barnes, has "revived the conservative movement beyond its wildest dreams."

Maybe I have wilder dreams than conservatives. But I doubt it. And it seems to me that the most underdiscussed news of the first six months of the Clinton presidency is that, as far as his re-election is concerned, he now has the Republicans right where he wants them.

Don't laugh until I'm finished, please. Let's start with the issue that won the Texas Senate seat for the GOP—a call to cut the deficit by slashing spending rather than raising taxes. Barely two weeks after the Texas election, Senate Republicans presented their actual deficit-reduction plan. Senators Dole, Domenici and Packwood unveiled it on June 23. It was voted down the same day. It came and went so quickly that few people outside Washington noticed how pathetic it was.

The Republican plan didn't contain any tax increases, all right. But it also didn't come close to eliminating the deficit. The Senate Democrats' plan, stripped of various accounting tricks, cuts the deficit about $445 billion over five years. The Republicans, according to their own calculations, managed only a $367 billion reduction. They got that by, first, accepting all of Clinton's defense cuts ($72 billion). Then they accepted all of the Senate Democrats' spending cuts ($116 billion). Then, to make up for dropping the Democrats' tax increases, they proposed putting "caps" on spending (except Social Security).

Spending "caps," of course, are not spending *cuts*. A spending cut directs that a specific expenditure not be made. (Sample: ending subsidies to high-income beneficiaries of Medicare's supplementary medical insurance saves $8 billion.) A spending *cap* is simply a pledge by Congress to force itself to cut something, somewhere, at some time in the future. It is like promising to start your diet next week. Conservatives have ridiculed Clinton's budget for concentrating its cuts in the distant "out years" of 1996-98. "The spending cuts are almost entirely hypothetical," declares George Will. But *all* the Republican cuts in entitlements, according to Dole and Domenici, were scheduled for 1997 and 1998. They were "hypothetical" squared.

The Dole/Domenici plan is now a piece of paper in last week's trash. But it retains its larger significance: it undermines two of the GOP's most feared electoral strategies. The first is the claim, reiterated for at least thirteen years, that the deficit can, in practice, be controlled through spending cuts alone. That's no longer credible. (Indeed, polls show that about two-thirds of the public now believes a tax increase will be needed to reduce the deficit.) Second, it will be hard for Republicans to claim Clinton has gutted defense when they have themselves embraced his defense cuts.

No tax issue. No defense issue. No communism issue. What does the right have left—assuming Clinton doesn't hand them the competence issue? Well, they can hope for a recession. More aggressively, they talk of a "culture war" against liberals, featuring battles over crime, abortion and family values. The problem here is that, since the 1960s, most Democrats have moved "right," while mainstream culture has moved "left." The gaps that remain often consist of differences in nuance or degree. Even Republican Party ideologists display an impolitic tolerance. William Kristol, Dan Quayle's former chief of staff, told *The New York Times* that "I do not think society can or should treat homosexuality the same as heterosexuality, or at least the same as the heterosexual family." Kristol did not say homosexuality is evil. He couldn't even bring himself to say it's flatly worse than heterosexuality. Some *kulturkampf*!

In order for the "culture" issue to work, in other words, Democrats have to take the bait—proposing to legalize gay marriage, for example, or opposing the death penalty. Clinton isn't about to do this. Quite the opposite. Kristol suggests that conservatives might coalesce around a "one-nation" agenda—combining opposition to reverse discrimination with "English-only," pro-assimilation sen-

continued on page 44

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JULY 19 & 26, 1993

THE BAGHDAD SYNDROME

So the president who was wary about the use of American power and wary about unilateral American action and wary about his relationship with the American armed forces has led the United States in a solitary and skillful raid on the headquarters of Saddam Hussein's secret police. There was a strange disparity between the scale of our action and the scale of our president's swelling about it. The White House took pains to portray the president toughly: he played golf, he slept well, he displayed all the macho insouciance that the American people expect of a commander in chief. The polls surged for a day or two, then fell back again. As politics, the raid on Baghdad was a bit of a bust.

As foreign policy, though, it was encouraging. The raid was certainly justified. The attempt to assassinate George Bush in retaliation for Operation Desert Storm was an outrage that required prompt, clear and solo American action. The principle of proportionality was respected by American planners, almost to a fault. The target that was chosen was a truly evil place, the Lubyanka of Baghdad, a central institution of the terror and the torture that characterize Saddam's regime. And the silence from the Arab world the morning after was almost deafening. Even in his own region, there is no significant price to pay for the struggle against Saddam.

But is this raid the new rule, or an exception to the old rule? Does it signify that the Clinton administration is prepared to act aggressively, in earnest and over time, in the entirety of its Iraq policy? William Safire, who seems to have gotten hold of the "military options list" that was presented to the president for the planning of the raid, cogently noted in *The New York Times* that "Mr. Clinton chose from among the weakest military options." No air strikes were ordered, for example, on the rest of Saddam's infrastructure of terror in Baghdad; or on the Republican Guard massed along the Kurdish border; or on the Iraqi army more generally, which, according to a report recently issued by a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee, has been almost entirely rebuilt; or on Iraq's restored chemical and nuclear installations. It takes rather a lot to rattle a murderer like Saddam. It may be that the leader of America slept well in the wake of the raid, but we fear that the leader of Iraq slept well too.

So the raid was just *and* cheesy. It does not quite retire some of the larger questions about the direction of this administration's conduct in world affairs. Bush organized the opinion of the world against Saddam and threw the full weight of American power and policy against him, and so Saddam wanted to kill him; and it is the duty of Bush's successor to make Saddam feel the same way about him too. But is the Clinton administration, satisfied it has shown its stuff, now going to return to its earlier platitudes about the obsolescence of American leadership in the world and the unattractiveness of force as an instrument of American policy? Or has the new president really settled into his responsibilities as commander in chief, and understood the role of power in foreign policy and grasped the rough and Hobbesian character of politics among nations?

There is one obvious place in which the president can demonstrate that such an evolution really has occurred. The name of that place is Bosnia. When historians come to write the story of the post-cold war world, they will certainly conclude that the atrocities that Milosevic's Serbs are committing in Bosnia rank with the atrocities that Saddam committed in the north of Iraq and in the south. Is there not a building in Belgrade the destruction of which will trouble Milosevic's sleep? The Europeans are as courageous about acting on their opposition to Milosevic as the Arabs are about acting on their opposition to Saddam; and the European response to American action, we suspect, would probably be about as troublesome. •

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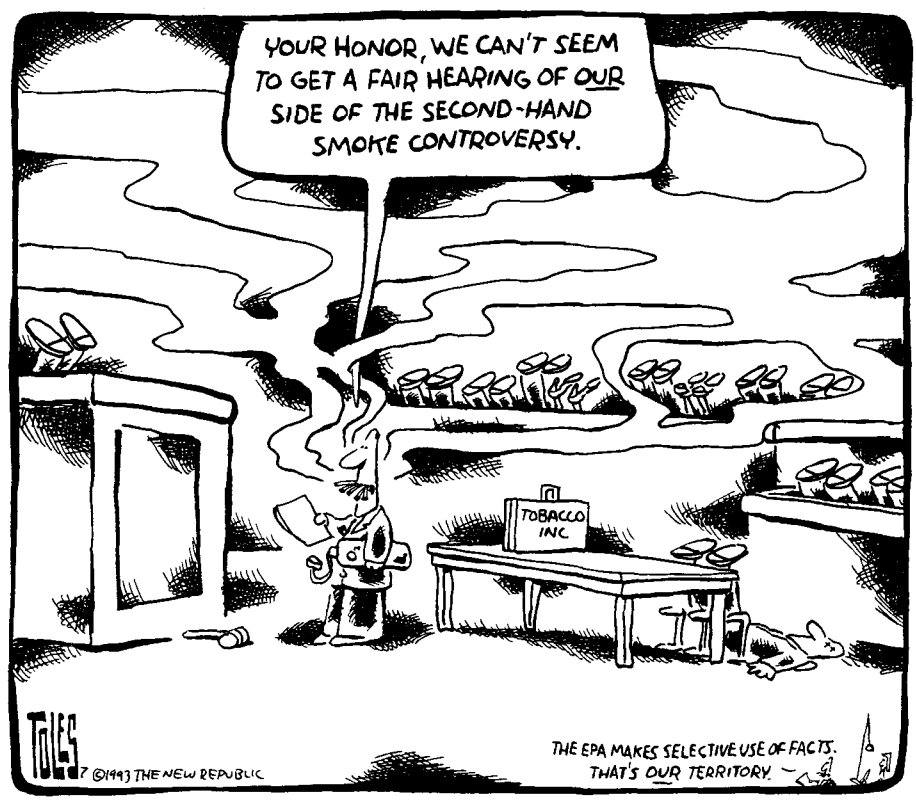
NOTEBOOK

SATURDAY NIGHT'S ALL RIGHT FOR FIGHTING: The White House press corps is stamping its feet because it wasn't tipped off to last weekend's missile attack on Baghdad. According to *The Washington Post*'s Howard Kurtz, on Saturday afternoon the Clintonites told the press there would be no further announcements for the day. When word of the strike came through, angry reporters had to rush back to work. Since then, the scribes have flogged press secretary Dee Dee Myers, accusing her of misleading them and taunting her for being "out of the loop." (A contradiction that seems lost on the fourth estate.) The reporters have a point. In the future, Clinton really ought to clear these things with the press before he goes and wrecks their weekends.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DAN QUAYLE WAS RIGHT: Upset at incidents of lawyer-bashing, the American Bar Association last week launched a $700,000 "communications" campaign aimed at "countering negative public attitudes" about members of their profession. "We need to tell the public we are not about bad things, we are about good things," ABA member Harry Hathaway told *Wall Street Journal* reporter Richard Schmitt. The image-buffers have their work cut out for them. An adjacent story, headlined SUITS INVOLVING DEFUNCT BENDECTIN CHILL DEVELOPMENT OF PREGNANCY MEDICATION, describes how a barrage of lawsuits has scared pharmaceutical companies away from drug research for women's health problems.

JURASSIC CARP: "The dinosaur of segregated politics has been buried for less than three decades in the South. Now with her disingenuous and ahistorical attack on the Voting Rights Act in a North Carolina case, Justice O'Connor proposes to clone that dinosaur into a monster that could gobble up the nation's hard-won progress toward higher majority membership in Congress, legislatures and local governments." —editorial in *The New York Times*, June 30

"Now is the time to kill the 'Taxasaurus' monster! Kill the dinosaur, kill him now! If you don't, he's going to eat more jobs. So take this lead pencil and give him lead poisoning. Kill him!" —Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York during the budget debate

MANUFACTURING DISSENT: The most distressing feature of the Supreme Court's end-of-term decisions was its dishonest treatment of earlier precedents. In *Heller* v. *Doe*, Byron White, as one of his last acts, cast the fifth vote to apply relaxed scrutiny to claims of discrimination against the mentally retarded. In the process, White effectively overturned one of his own most important decisions, the 1985 *Cleburne* case. But the majority opinion in *Heller* scarcely mentioned *Cleburne*. As David Souter pointed out in his careful dissents, the characterization of prior precedents is similarly cavalier in *St. Mary* v. *Hicks*, which changed the burden of proof for discriminatory treatment cases under Title VII, and *Shaw* v. *Reno*, which allowed challenges to bizarre redistricting schemes under the Voting Rights Act. The Court shouldn't hesitate to overturn poorly reasoned precedents, especially in constitutional cases. But because the conservatives refuse to be candid, the dissenting justices are reduced to laboriously explaining what the earlier cases actually said, rather than debating the underlying issues.

INDEPENDENCE DAY: This is a combined issue, and the magazine will not be published next week. The editors will be on Total Quality Holiday. •

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BIHAĆ POSTCARD

POCKET CHANGE

By Anna Husarska

Like puddles drying on a sunny day, the patches of Muslim-held territory are getting smaller on the maps of Bosnia and Herzegovina that illustrate Serb and Croat aggression. As of this writing, the territory consists of a crescent-shaped chunk of land from Tuzla to Zenica, the surrounded city of Sarajevo, the three besieged towns of Srebrenica, Žepa and Goražde and the northwestern horn of Bosnia, called *Bihaćki djep*, the Bihać pocket.

The war started in Bihać on June 12, 1992, when the Serbs turned their guns on the hills surrounding the town and started shelling it. I first came here last August, and the shelling was heavy. Serb commanders wanted to force all the Muslims out and bring 150,000 Serbs in; this would have linked Krajina, the territory they had grabbed from the Croats, with the territory they were in the process of grabbing from Bosnia.

Yet after one year, Bihać is still in Muslim hands. And with any luck it will remain so. Each of the successive peace plans devised to end the war has left the pocket to the Muslims: the now-defunct Vance-Owen peace plan had it as "Province Number One," earmarked for the Muslims; and under the U.N.'s subsequent "safe zones" Bihać is on the short list again, together with Sarajevo, Tuzla and the three besieged enclaves. (This plan too is probably doomed, however, because the U.N. has not backed it with any threat of force and only timidly wagged its blue finger at Radovan Karadžić, the Serb nationalists' leader.) Even under the blunt Serbo-Croatian plan to partition Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bihać would apparently remain a Muslim-controlled territory, administered by the Bosnian government.

In Bihać the sheer mention of "safe zones" infuriates Ramiz Dreković, the commander of the Fifth Bosnian Army Corps. His bushy eyebrows meet as he frowns and goes off on a verbal crusade against the world: "Reservations, that is what you want.... Europe and even America are afraid of Karadžić.... You recognized us in order to destroy us, but this will not stand.... Just let Boutros-Boutros Ghali try to disarm us as he did in Srebrenica, just let him try." And bang! bang! his fist hits the table. "All foreigners should be forbidden to enter this territory because it is a shame what your governments are doing."

Dreković boasts about the morale and the equipment of his army. But the mayor of Bihać, Nenad Ibrahimpasić, who receives me in a bomb shelter under the town hall, where he sleeps, confides, "We had to sell our cows to buy guns." He too is angry at the West for the arms embargo: "They took away from us the right to defend ourselves. They are afraid of a Muslim state in Europe. But we are not fundamentalists, we are Euro-Muslims."

The pocket—6,000 square miles, population 300,000—is surrounded by enemies: to the north and west it is wrapped by Krajina, part of Serb-occupied Croatia (from which Serbs launch ground attacks); to the southeast lies Serb-occupied Bosnia, which goes by the name "Republika Srpska" (and from which Serbs on the hills shell Bihać).

The city of Bihać, with its 60,000 inhabitants, is the most exposed in the whole pocket. The main public buildings are barricaded with sandbags made from discarded humanitarian food aid sacks, checkered blankets and colorful swan-print pillowcases. The motel where U.N. observers, the International Red Cross and visiting journalists stay has fortified its ground floor restaurant with refrigerators filled with gravel and piled like huge bricks. The hospital, the town hall and many private houses are protected by stacks of lumber, their windows shielded with raw wooden slats.

Before the war the Bihać pocket was rather well-off, largely thanks to the lush farmland and to Agrokomerc, a huge food-processing plant twenty-five miles north of Bihać in Velika Kladuša that employed 7,000 workers and exported products to thirty-eight countries. Even now the pocket looks prosperous, at least by the standards of other Muslim-held parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The land is still a blessing and agriculture still works, if only partly. And many of those who don't work on a farm buy and sell goods on Bihać's blossoming street market. Merchants with makeshift stands (often no more than a cardboard box and a fishing stool) offer a wide array of products—cigarettes, shampoo, lipstick, soap, coffee, cookies and detergent—none of which is included in U.N. humanitarian aid packages. Young people in fancy clothes go to a night club, the motel serves booze.

Most of these coveted goodies are smuggled into Bihać by Fikret Abdić, Agrokomerc's director and one of the ten members of the collective presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the leader of a group of dissenters opposing President Alija Izetbegović. When his company ceased production after the fighting broke out, Abdić organized a vast bootlegging operation. Using his extensive Croat contacts, many of whom are his former employees, Abdić purchases most of the products in Croatia. To get the merchandise through the front line, he pays off his Serbian contacts from Krajina (many of whom also once worked for Agrokomerc), thus easing the convoy's path through the corridor. And last November he worked out a particularly handy trade-off with the French battalion operating in Bihać. The French needed space to station their military equipment, cars and trucks; Abdić had Agrokomerc's unused office buildings and parking lots

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but needed a way to transport his goods. So in exchange for the storage space, the French battalion now escorts some 400 tons of Agrokomerc's products each week into Bihać, almost matching the volume of humanitarian aid brought by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

But humanitarian aid is not Abdić's line of work: he is a businessman. And he needs to make sure that there is money available in Bihać for people to buy his imported products. For this he has valuable contacts too. Abdić has arranged a way for émigrés from Bihać to deposit money in Agrokomerc's pre-war bank accounts in Croatia, Slovenia and Austria for their families in the pocket. Lists of the depositors and addressees are faxed into Agrokomerc's office; after ten days (during which time Abdić skims off the interest) the money can be picked up at a bank in Velika Kladuša. Some 12,000 people have taken advantage of the arrangement. The average transfer is 3,000 deutsche marks.

"People here know that I am the only one who can break the blockade and bring goods to the pocket," says the 53-year-old, white-haired Abdić. "And believe me, there is not one compliment that I did not hear from my people. But make profit on those who suffer from war? No!"

Such wide-scale commerce in foreign currency could potentially destroy the local currency. But it does not, because local currency *is* foreign currency. Until last August Bihać functioned with the old Yugoslav dinars, but corrupt bank officials from Belgrade flooded the city with the bank notes (instead of destroying them); inflation reached 1 million percent. Since then, deutsche marks have been declared the official currency. To fight the acute shortage of small denominations, local cafés and restaurants print their own coupons for 1 or 2 DM on small pieces of cardboard stamped with the name of the business. "It is the most peculiar currency," I remark to the bartender in my hotel, as I drink with a Serb in Croat uniform who is defending this Muslim enclave from Serb attacks. "Yeah, we now have our own ... pocket money," she says. The Serb in Croat uniform winks at me, and gives me a cardboard 2 DM bill as souvenir.

I meet him the next day in the center of the town, and he shows me around. Many of the cafés are still open and busy—including the Bihać Hard Rock Café—and since this is a quiet day, people sit outdoors under colorful umbrellas. Girls in fancy dresses flirt, young businessmen in shades conduct shady business. As I stand in the town center, dumbfounded by its Parisian atmosphere, a local philosopher—late 30s, long hair, melancholic—approaches me. He asks me for a light, and the conversation immediately turns to multinational coexistence. It so happens that he is a Serb, one of 3,000 or so who remain in town. "Here all three ethnic groups can live together," he explains, just as my eyes spot three death announcements posted on the boarded window of a nearby store. One is adorned with an Orthodox cross, the second with a Catholic cross, the third is in a green frame with the Muslim crescent. The philosopher follows my eyes to the announcements and adds, philosophically, "All three ethnic groups can die together too." •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

WHIRLING GERGEN

By Fred Barnes

Minutes before President Clinton was scheduled to disclose the June 26 missile attack on Baghdad on national T.V., he suddenly got nervous. "Do we know whether we hit the target?" Clinton asked. No one with him in the Oval Office had an answer. But David Gergen, the new White House counselor, sought to find one. He called CNN chief Tom Johnson on a pretext, then asked what Johnson had heard. No, Johnson said, he couldn't confirm that American cruise missiles had struck Baghdad. His team of reporters wouldn't arrive there until the next day. However, somebody's relative had phoned from Baghdad and said there had been explosions. That was confirmation enough under the circumstances. (Vice President Al Gore joked that Clinton should call the raid a "relative success.") Reassured, Clinton prepared to address the nation. Just before he spoke, official word from military sources confirmed that the target, the Iraqi intelligence compound, had been hit.

Gathering foreign intelligence isn't part of Gergen's job description. But he's done a little of everything and a lot of one thing since he arrived on June 3 for full-time duty. He prodded Clinton to resolve the Lani Guinier issue promptly. He and George Stephanopoulos, whose new title is "senior adviser for policy and strategy," spent the evening of June 13 with Clinton as he decided on a Supreme Court nominee. Gergen favored Ruth Bader Ginsburg, as did Stephanopoulos. She was named the next day. Along with Stephanopoulos, he urged Clinton to stop bad-mouthing the economy and take credit for good news, a tack Clinton adopted at his prime-time news conference on June 17. Gergen discussed with the president an article he wrote in April as editor-at-large at *U.S. News & World Report* on Clinton's need to reach out to the military and earn the Pentagon's respect. Clinton is now trying to repair relations with the military. The Baghdad raid, carried out without hand-wringing or leaks at the White House, will help.

The one thing Gergen has concentrated on is changing the face of the Clinton presidency. Like a plastic surgeon, he's made the patient look nicer without fundamentally altering anything. Clinton aides who were

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hostile to Gergen at the outset have been impressed. One White House skeptic now says this about Gergen: "He knows when an issue's ripening and how to stage things to get our sound bites and messages across." The televised session with reporters in the East Room was Gergen's idea. So were the charts Clinton used to defend his economic program. Gergen knows how effectively President Reagan used them in his first speech in 1981 outlining his economic policies. As Reagan's communications director at the time, he helped put together those charts. Now, for Clinton, he produced charts aimed at reversing his old boss's policies.

A typical Gergen ploy was having Clinton make a sudden appearance before the press on the colonnade outside the Oval Office on June 23 to deliver a sound bite attacking Republicans. This was part of the strategy, largely Gergen's doing, to change the nature of the debate on Clinton's economic package in the run-up to the Senate vote on June 25. The strategy began on June 19 with a radio address and commencement speech at Northeastern University in Boston. In both, Clinton challenged Republicans to come forward with an alternative. The idea was to turn the economic debate into a fight between himself and Republicans, not between the White House and congressional Democrats. It worked.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Gergen is a believer in using the White House press room for advocacy. He dispatched Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen and budget director Leon Panetta there to push Clinton's economic case. He exploits small cracks in the president's schedule to slip visitors, especially critics, into the Oval Office for brief meetings. On June 15 he ushered Ben Wattenberg, the neocon columnist, and myself into Clinton's presence for twenty minutes. Clinton sounded moderate, insisting he'd seek more spending cuts and blaming his liberal image solely on his support for gays in the military. Clinton referred to Gergen as "my conservative adviser," then grinned and changed that to "my centrist adviser." A week later Gergen escorted Jack Faris, president of the National Federation of Independent Business, the small-business lobby, in for a chat. Months earlier Gergen had written presciently that the NFIB would emerge as a major opponent of Clinton's economic and health care policies. With Faris in the room, he steered Clinton into agreeing to address the NFIB's convention in Washington on June 29.

The most delicate task on Gergen's agenda, gaining the trust of other staffers, will take time. But he's off to a good start. Contrary to conventional wisdom, he didn't supplant Stephanopoulos. The decision to shift Stephanopoulos had been made months earlier. Gergen considered bringing in a new communications director from the outside, but concluded that hiring Mark Gearan from within would make for a smoother transition. He let Gearan take Stephanopoulos's spacious office near the press room, while he moved into the small basement office that once housed the White House barber. He's forced to hold meetings in the hall. And Gergen has stayed off T.V. interview shows. But his most effective move was a soul-searching meeting with the roughly fifty communications office staffers on June 4. Gergen reminisced about his old days in the Nixon, Ford and Reagan administrations. Hearing there were only three speechwriters, he said, "That's incredible." No, said speechwriter Alan Stone, "it's a war crime." Gergen promised to beef up the speechwriting operation.

Gergen's relationship with Clinton was already cemented. They became friends after meeting in 1985 at Renaissance Weekend in South Carolina. After Clinton bombed at the 1988 Democratic convention with a long-winded speech, Gergen dropped off a note of encouragement at his hotel. On the day Clinton announced his presidential bid in 1991, he chatted with Gergen by phone for ninety minutes. However, it was the brainstorm of Mack McLarty, the White House chief of staff, to bring Gergen aboard. He talked to Gergen on a Sunday night in late May. On Tuesday he offered him a job. Gergen got the offer as he stood in a phone booth at a

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Chevron station in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he was giving a speech. On Thursday, Gergen ate a late dinner at McLarty's house and talked to Clinton by phone. He conferred alone with Hillary Clinton for an hour on Friday, then from 11 p.m. to nearly 2 a.m. with the president. The next morning, Gergen's appointment was announced in the Rose Garden. The initial plan was to announce Stephanopoulos's shift first, then Gergen in a few days. But word leaked about Gergen, so the two moves were disclosed simultaneously.

McLarty wanted Gergen to replace Stephanopoulos as communications director or hold a twin job, counselor and communications director. Gergen declined, figuring if he had the communications title, he would be stuck in that job. He'd had that post in the Reagan White House and knew its limitations. He wanted broader influence. In negotiations with Clinton and McLarty, he sought assurance on three points. One is that he would be in all the important meetings, including those of the National Security Council. He has been. In fact, the meetings that matter now are those of the new troika—Gergen, McLarty, Stephanopoulos—and he's the senior partner at the moment. Second, Gergen wanted Clinton's consent to a major effort to improve relations with the press. Clinton agreed, and the wooing of the media started immediately. And third, he asked for assurance that Clinton's philosophical direction be centrist, not liberal. On this, too, Gergen was satisfied. In the end, the first two points are dwarfed by the last one. Press relations affect a presidency only at the margin. But if Clinton holds to a centrist course, that's significant. Should that happen, there's one way we'll know for sure whether Gergen is responsible. Gergen is a big advocate of cutting capital gains taxes. If Clinton becomes one—he hinted at it in his NIFB speech—we'll know why. •

My father's American journey.

FALSE GOLD

By Fae Myenne Ng

It's that same old, same old story. We all have an immigrant ancestor, one who believed in America; one who, daring or duped, took sail. The Golden Venture emigrants have begun the American journey, suffering and sacrificing, searching for the richer, easier life. I know them; I could be one of their daughters. Like them, my father took the sacrificial role of being the first to venture. Now, at the end of his life, he calls it a bitter, no-luck life. I have always lived with his question, Was it worth it? As a child, I saw the bill-by-bill payback and I felt my own unpayable emotional debt. Obedience and Obligation: the Confucian curse.

For $4,000 my father became the fourth son of a legal Chinese immigrant living in San Francisco. His paper-father sent him a coaching book, detailing complicated family history. It was 1940; my father paid ninety more dollars for passage on the S.S. *Coolidge*. He had little hand luggage, a change of clothes, herbs and seeds and a powder for soup. To soothe his pounding heart during the fifteen-day voyage he recited the coaching book over and over again. It was not a floating hell. "The food was Chinese. We traveled third-class. A bunk was good enough space." He was prepared for worse. He'd heard about the Peruvian ships that transported Chinese coolies for plantation labor in the 1850s. (Every generation has a model.) One hundred and twenty days. Two feet by six for each man. Were these the first ships to be called floating hells?

Gold Mountain was the name of my father's America. In February, when the Golden Venture immigrants sailed from Bangkok, they were shouting, *Mei Guo! Mei Guo!* "Beautiful Country" was the translation they preferred. America is the land of light and hope. But landing here is only the beginning of a long tale. When I saw the photos of the shipwrecked Chinese on the beach, I was reminded of the men kept on Angel Island, the detention center in the middle of San Francisco Bay. A sea of hats on the deck of the ship. Triple-decked bunkers. Men in loose pants playing volleyball. "Was volleyball fun?" I wanted to know. My father shrugged, "Nothing else to do. It helped pass the day." Our fathers spent months detained on Angel Island. Their name for it was Wooden House. What, I wonder, are the Chinese calling the detention center in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania?

After his release from Angel Island, my father lived at a bachelor hotel on Waverly Place with a dozen other bachelors in one room, communal toilets, no kitchen. He had breakfast at Uncle's Cafe, dinners at the Jackson Cafe, midnight noodles at Sam Wo's. Drinks at the Li Po Bar or Red's Place, where fat burlesque queens sat on his lap. Marriage for duty. Sons for tradition. My father left the hotel but kept the habits. He still eats like a mouse, in the middle of the night, cooking on a hot plate in his room. (I do my version of the same.) He keeps his money under the floorboard. When I have it, I like to have a grip, bill by bill. Like everyone, too little money upsets me; but more money than I can hold upsets me too. I feel obliged to give it away. Is it a wonder that money has a dirty feel? Get it and get it fast. Then get rid of it.

I remember this Angel Island photograph. Thirty bare-chested Chinese men are waiting for a medical examination. The doctor, a hunching man with a scraping stare, sits at a small desk, elbows and thick hands over a black book. At his side, a guard in knee-high boots measures a boy's forehead. Arranged by height, baby-eyed boys stand stoop-shouldered on the outer edge. The men, at least a head taller, stand toward the center of the room, staring at the exam-

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iner. Those eyes scare me. Bold and angry and revengeful. Eyes that owe. Eyes that will make you pay. Humiliation with a vengeance.

As boldly, the Golden Venture men have looked into American cameras. (If they believed a foot on soil would make them legal, a photo in an American newspaper would be as good as a passport.) There was a "See me!" bounce in their faces. They'd arrived, and now they wanted to send their news back home. And back home, a grateful father jumped when he picked out his son as one of the survivors, "He's alive! My son made it."

Another photo. A Golden Venture man looks out from a locked door, his face framed by a tight window. He has a jail-view of the Beautiful Country. How would he describe his new world? I imagine he'd use his own body as a measure. "Window, two head high. Sun on both ears." Can we forget the other "face" photograph taken earlier this century? The sold and smuggled prostitute, demoted from brothel to a crib, a wooden shack with barred windows that barely fits a cot. Looking out from her fenced window, she has the same downcast eyes, the same bitter-strange lips that seem to be smiling as well as trembling. The caption quotes her price: "Lookee two bits, feelee floor bits, doee six bits."

Life was and still is weighed in gold. People buy people. Sons and wives and slaves. There was the imperial edict that forbade Chinese to leave China; there was China's contribution to France during World War I, in which tens of thousands of Chinese lived horrible lives as indentured slaves. I've heard parents threaten to sell children who misbehave. (Mine threatened to throw me into the garbage can where they claimed they found me.) There's the story of Old Man Jeong, the one on Beckett Alley. Lonely after his wife died, fearful no one would care for him in his senile retirement, he went back to his home village and bought himself a wife. A woman born in 1956.

Listen to the animal names. Snakes sneak into America. The Golden Venture was a snake ship. The emigrants are snake cargo; the middleman, a snakehead. In my father's time, a pig was sold to America. A pig gets caught, a pig gets cheated. My father feels cheated, sold, on an easy story.

On a recent visit to my father's house in Guangzhou, I found his original coaching book. I knew it had been untouched since he last held it. In my hand, the loosely bound papers felt like ashes. I thought about how when he committed everything to memory, he became another man's son. There's an elaborate map of the family compound; each page is lined with questions and answers, some marked with red circles. Tedious questions and absurd details. How much money did Second Brother send to Mother? How much farmland did Mother have and what vegetables were harvested? Third Brother's wife's feet, were they big or bound? The book has a musty smell that reaches into my throat.

One out of every four relations let me know they wanted to come to America. At the end of my visit, a distant relation and her 13-year-old daughter followed me into the rice paddies. "I'm selling her," the mother told me.

"What did you say? Say again?" I replied.

She held a palm over her (golden) lower teeth, and said it again, "Don't know what I'm saying? Sell. We sell her."

I stared at her. She laughed some more and then just walked away, back toward the village. The girl followed me, quiet till we got to the river, where she posed for some pictures and then asked for my address. I wrote it on the back of a business card. (I considered giving her my post office box.) I hope never to be surprised. I hope never to see this child at my door holding the card like a legal document.

"Don't add and don't take away" was the advice of an uncle who heard that I wrote things. Stay safe. Keep us safe. How right that "China" is written with the character "middle." Obedience is a safe position. The Golden Venture men trusted the stories they heard. Their clansmen entrusted their dreams to them. The question is not how bad it is in China. The question is how good it can be in America. My father believes the Golden Venturers have only passed through the first hell. In coming to America, he laments (there is no other word) that he trusted too much. Ironic that in Chinese he bought a name that reads, To Have Trust.

FAE MYENNE NG is the author of *Bone* (Hyperion).

Is Clinton following in Carter's footsteps?

THE RIGHTS STUFF

By Jacob Weisberg

The fourteen members of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Vienna Conference on Human Rights made a triumphal return to Foggy Bottom last week, having negotiated the Clinton administration's first international agreement. The unanimous declaration, signed by 182 nations, is the first fruit of the president's plan to integrate human rights into foreign policy. Clinton considered the Vienna meeting so important that he sent not only Tim Wirth, his undersecretary of state for global affairs, and John Shattuck, assistant secretary for human rights, but also Secretary of State Warren Christopher, one of the formulators of human rights policy under Jimmy Carter, the last president to make it a top priority.

Unfortunately, the Vienna accord is a distressing one, for it diminishes the idea of human rights even as the administration attempts to elevate it. The thirty-six-page declaration, which Wirth and Shattuck applauded in

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interviews, recognizes the Right to Development ("a universal and inalienable right and integral part of fundamental human rights"), the Right to Debt Relief and the rights of "the girl-child," but it fails to articulate the basic civil rights and civil liberties enumerated in the Bill of Rights and in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nowhere does it contain an unambiguous avowal of the rights of free expression, freedom of worship or freedom of assembly. Indeed, the administration's championing of the document and the conference that drafted it raises the question of whether Clinton is repeating the mistakes of Carter's well-intentioned but flawed human rights policy.

The sharpest critique of the Carter effort was developed by Joshua Muravchik, a Clinton campaign adviser and a candidate for the human rights post that eventually went to Shattuck. In his book *The Uncertain Crusade*, Muravchik criticized the Carterites for, among other things, failing to see the connection between the development of democracy and the promotion of human rights and for their inability to define what they meant by human rights. "The good the Carter policy did for the idea of human rights by broadcasting it must be weighed against the harm it did by contributing to the miasma that surrounds the term, much of it deliberately stirred up by the enemies of human rights," Muravchik concluded. Already a debate has emerged between the centrist Democrats who accept Muravchik's critique and the more traditional liberals, including Wirth, who think the Carter policy was just fine.

Clinton addressed the democracy issue even before he was elected. His major foreign policy pronouncement during the campaign, a speech in Milwaukee on October 1, asserted that the advancement of democracy would be a pre-eminent goal of his foreign policy. Muravchik helped draft this speech, as did another conservative Democrat, Penn Kemble, deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency. William Galston and Jeremy Rosner of the Progressive Policy Institute, who share the view, helped make the furtherance of democracy a theme of Christopher's Senate confirmation statement. But the emphasis on democracy rankles some human rights activists who see the democracy movement supplanting their agenda. They argue that insisting on democracy as a precondition to human rights will limit our ability to criticize violations by undemocratic regimes. James O'Dea, the director of Amnesty International's Washington office, told *The Washington Post* in March, "We hope that emphasis on democracy won't shortchange human rights." During the transition, Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, who put herself forward as a candidate for the human rights job and is an administration appointee to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, prepared a paper arguing that the Reagan administration pursued democracy to the detriment of human rights.

The original draft of the speech Christopher was to deliver in Vienna was short on democratic cheerleading. As prepared by his speechwriter Bennett Freeman, it simply stated that "human rights and democracy are inseparable," without elaborating on the connection. According to State Department sources, Rosner, now director of legislative affairs at the National Security Council, was alarmed by the draft. He and Marshall recommended changes, as did Kemble, that were incorporated by Freeman. By the time the speech was given, it had evolved from a vague exhortation into an explicit argument that democracy is the best guarantor of human rights, and that advocacy of the two goals go hand in hand.

As delivered, Christopher's speech also took a strong stand in favor of a universal standard for human rights. "We cannot allow cultural relativism to become the last refuge of repression," he said. This was a calculated rebuff to China, Iran, Burma and other nations that explicitly argue that human rights do not apply to them. But although he thinks human rights are universal, Christopher failed, as have others in the administration, to define what he means by human rights. His speech left the impression with most listeners that he was calling on the Senate to ratify four U.N. treaties signed by President Carter, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This is a crucial issue because the treaties dramatically expand what the U.S. government has previously recognized as human rights to include the right to a decent standard of living, paid vacations, health care, maternity leave and so forth. No one questions that these are social goods, but they are not inalienable rights in the Jeffersonian sense that they exist even when they are denied by governments and positive law.

The most famous Carter-era statement on human rights, the 1977 Law Day speech by then-Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, put social and economic rights not just on par with, but ahead of political and civil rights. This is still Carter's position. "Our country is like all the others," he told *USA Today* at the conference. "We define human rights in the most convenient way. We don't want to acknowledge that a human right is a right to a home or a job or medical care." Carter made his feelings clear when he declined Wirth's invitation to serve as an honorary co-chair of the U.S. delegation, choosing to attend instead as a special guest of U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

As Carter's criticism suggests, it is less than clear that the Clinton administration has endorsed the former president's expansive definition of human rights. During his confirmation hearing in June, Shattuck said he supported ratification of the four U.N. treaties. But he added that the administration had not yet taken an official position. And though Christopher seemed to be urging the Senate to ratify the treaties in his Vienna speech, which is how the *Post* and *The New York Times* interpreted his remarks, others in the administration emphasize that his words were intentionally ambiguous. In the original draft, Christopher was to say he was "delighted to announce that my country is prepared to

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Competing for Customers

The achievement of U.S. students in grades K-12 is very poor. Schools are a government monopoly, so they have few, if any, incentives to change this. However, our colleges and universities, which are forced to compete, are the best in the world. If our elementary and secondary schools were subject to the discipline of the market—if they were forced to compete—they, too, would be excellent.

This is the outline of an argument that is often made by supporters of vouchers, private school choice and Whittle schools, and it's a frequent editorial theme of the *Wall Street Journal*.

The *Journal*, however, has also aimed its guns at higher education. A recent article, "Trophy Transcript Hunters Are Finding Professors Have Become an Easy Mark" (April 27, 1993), complains that college standards are going to pot as a result of widespread grade inflation. The average grade at Harvard is now somewhat higher than B+ (up from B- 25 years ago). Nearly half of Williams students graduated with honors last year, in contrast to under one-third in 1985. Only 8 percent of students at Stanford get Cs and Ds, and there is no such thing as a failing grade. At some schools, students are avoiding science and math in favor of the humanities so they can graduate with "a better-looking transcript." The article concentrates on selective colleges, where we'd expect standards to be relatively high. The same kind of bloat undoubtedly exists at second- and third-rank schools—in fact, it's probably worse there.

The *Journal* article puts grade inflation down to professorial softness. But what makes professors soft? Could it be that the very market competition system that is touted as a panacea for our public schools is a major factor in destroying the quality of higher education? That is what a couple of letters to *Journal* editors (June 8, 1993) say.

Dr. William A. Maesen, a former college teacher, explains grade inflation by citing "the market factor":

> When the institution needs to recruit and retain students to survive (a buyer's market), intellectual standards are at risk of being compromised.
>
> Alas, the maverick professor toiling to salvage competent academic standards may find students who vote with their feet and avoid his classes or opt for less demanding teachers. Lower enrollments can readily qualify that teacher for non-renewal of contract.

There is little doubt that competition would force schools to be sensitive to what customers want, but there's very little evidence that what they want is a rigorous education.

In a buyer's market, where colleges are competing for students, a professor who insists on high standards is much more likely to get in trouble than the students who fail to meet these standards. So high grades for students, many of whom are undoubtedly doing mediocre work, are no surprise. As Maesen says, "Market mechanisms apply as readily to academia as to sales operations."

Another letter to the *Wall Street Journal* in the same issue—from Arun and Suzanne Desai, both Ph.D.s, of Huntington, W.Va.—drives the point further. When the Desais asked their students what they looked for in choosing what courses to take—the professor's knowledge of the subject or his reputation as a generous grader—the response was decisive:

> Ninety percent openly voted (by raising their hands) that grades were most important. After all, they must get their degrees and jobs first. There is ample time to get knowledge later.
>
> Consequently, generous grades bring in good evaluations. College teachers are getting smarter and smarter. They have figured this out. No wonder there is grade inflation. Only a minority of teachers who are too theoretical or impractical would struggle to achieve higher standards.

Colleges are competing fiercely to get and retain students because those that fail to fill their classes risk going out of business. If, as the doctors Desai found, good grades are an end in themselves for students, who could blame colleges for using grade inflation as a competitive tool? That's how the market system operates.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many people were convinced that giving kids a wider range of courses to choose from would result in higher student achievement. We know what happened. Most kids were glad to take easy courses instead of tough ones, and achievement fell instead of rising.

The experience of colleges and universities shows that competition can force achievement down rather than improving it. The same could happen in elementary and secondary schools. Instead of looking for a school that insists on high standards, many youngsters—and their parents—are likely to prefer places where the kids can get good grades without doing much work. There is little doubt that competition would force schools to be sensitive to what customers want, but there's very little evidence that what they want is a rigorous education.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1993 by Albert Shanker.

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move forward on ratification of four rights treaties now before the Senate." After the speech passed through Rosner and Galston, however, the wording was softened; as Christopher delivered it, the speech said the administration would move forward with one of the treaties, the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and that it "strongly support[s] the general goals of the other treaties."

Non-Western governments have generally argued in U.N. forums that social and economic rights are basic human rights, of equal or greater importance than political and civil ones. There is a case for accepting their position even if we disagree with it, which is that treaties embodying ideas from both sides become weapons against dictators. The best support for this argument are the Helsinki Accords, in which the United States agreed to recognize "the inviolability of borders," namely Soviet domination of its satellites, in exchange for Communist bloc accession to the right to free movement across borders. The Helsinki Accords provided a means for internal and external critics of totalitarian regimes to draw attention to violations of human rights, thereby hastening the fall of Soviet communism. Advocates of the Vienna declaration argue that by supporting it despite its imperfections, we gained a potential mechanism for highlighting abuses. The agreement creates a new U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and is supposed to install a mechanism for prosecuting violations.

The U.N., however, will never act against internal violations of rights by its own member states; there are too many of them. In practice, the Vienna Declaration will be no more enforceable than the U.N. Charter of 1945 or the U.N. Universal Declaration of 1948, which are the organization's founding, and far more eloquent, documents. Subsequent U.N. treaties and conventions have done less for victims of governmental oppression than they have for the bureaucrats who travel to European capitals to negotiate them. It would be premature to pass judgment on Clinton's human rights policy, which remains very much a work in progress. Nevertheless, Wirth, Shattuck and Christopher have yet to explain why it was so important to participate in a meeting that began by slamming a door in the Dalai Lama's face and ended with a ringing expression of human rights slush. But to do that, they would have to know what they think about human rights. And it's not clear that they do. •

Notes toward a definition of Clintonism.

TOTAL QUALITY MEANING

By Leon Wieseltier

I.

There are words that cast a spell because they seem to deliver what they denote, because they feel like a part of the experience that they describe. "Love" is such a word; so is "grunge." The most seductive of these words, however, is surely "meaning." To say "meaning" is to have meaning, or so it is commonly believed. Even the worry about meaning seems enough to secure one against the lack of it. It fills one instantly with a toasty feeling of philosophy.

The worry about meaninglessness, moreover, is usually an instrument for the imposition of a particular meaning. For meaninglessness is, in truth, very rare. It is even something of an achievement, a perverse kind of purification: it is not easy to be really empty. Human life, individually and collectively, is drenched in senses and significances. The words, the images, the memories, the symbols, the ceremonies, the traditions or the fragments of the traditions, are everywhere to be found in this electronically and spiritually wired society. And the contradictions between all these meanings do not suffice to annul them all. The contemporary problem is not that people believe in too little, it is that they believe in too much. Too much of what too many people believe is too easily acquired and too thoughtlessly held. Americans are choking on identities. Not the lack of meaning, but the glibness of meaning, is the trouble.

Meaninglessness, therefore, is your lack of my meaning, as Ambrose Bierce said that impiety is your contempt for my god. This is particularly the case when meaning collides with politics, as it has in the hapless early days of the Clinton administration. "The politics of meaning" has become the administration's first (but certainly not its last) slogan. It is a slogan particularly flattering to politicians, because it seems to raise them high above the grime of democracy, to promote them from politics to pedagogy. Thus Hillary Rodham Clinton, who does not seem to grasp the difference

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between the requirements for political authority and the requirements for moral authority, recently announced to students at the University of Texas in Austin that

> we lack at some core level meaning in our individual lives and meaning collectively.... We are, I think, in a crisis of meaning. What do our governmental institutions mean? What do our lives in today's world mean? ... What do all of our institutions mean? What does it mean to be educated? What does it mean in today's world to pursue not only vocations, to be part of institutions, but to be human? ... We need a new politics of meaning.

And then, rather astonishingly, Mrs. Clinton warned her audience to be patient about meaning, because "we are breaking new ground." New ground? There is no older ground. But there is a certain sensibility, for which Mrs. Clinton's generation is famous, and which she perfectly exemplifies, that hates being preceded. Everything it experiences is experienced for the first time. When it sees, there is light; and when it fails to see, the whole world is covered in darkness. For such a sensibility, the past is the enemy of excitement. It is possible, of course, to discover the old, and to feel it like the new; but such a discovery should move one to learn, not to teach.

Even in recent history, Mrs. Clinton's theme is familiar. Something similar preoccupied the politics of the early 1950s, at least among the intellectuals. In the '50s, however, the anxiety about meaning was occasioned by death camps. In the '90s the anxiety about meaning is occasioned by junk bonds. This is thin stuff. ("The politics of meaning" was coined a few years ago by Michael Lerner, the editor of *Tikkun* magazine and a self-described "leader in Jewish thought.") In Austin, Mrs. Clinton gratefully cited three modern thinkers, Alexis de Tocqueville, Albert Schweitzer, and Lee Atwater. She seems to have been especially affected by Atwater's eleventh-hour repentance of Reaganism as it was recounted in (or invented for) *Life* magazine, and in her "little book of sayings and Scriptures that I find important and that replenish me from time to time" she inscribed these words of Atwater's: "I acquired more wealth, power, and prestige [in the '80s] than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty.... It is a truth that the country, caught up in its ruthless ambitions and moral decay, can learn on my dime." A few months after her address in Austin, Mrs. Clinton adduced these words again in an interview in *The Washington Post*. They speak to her.

Never mind that the limits of materialism are not best learned on somebody's dime. The "politics of meaning" turns out to be, negatively, just an ornate rejection of Reaganism. But it is historically incorrect, and politically foolish, to mistake Reaganism for meaninglessness. It was, quite the contrary, a riot of meaning. Those who believed that the Soviet Union was evil, or that the entrepreneur is the hero of capitalism (which is not always the same thing as an "ethos of selfishness and greed"), or that abortion is murder, or that the federal government should not fund sexually explicit art, or that affirmative action is a distortion of the ideal of merit, may have been right or wrong, but they were not poor in first principles. It was American liberalism, not America, that was adrift during the last decade.

Mrs. Clinton, who prospered handsomely during the last decade, and remarked during the campaign that "you can't be a lawyer if you don't represent banks," denounced the meanings of the other side without a hint of contrition. (There are lawyers, after all, who do not represent banks, and there are even people, imagine, who are not lawyers.) And then she offered a positive characterization of her teaching. It has nothing to do with religion, though it is religiose. Her "politics of meaning" is a rejection of individualism, which is, she thinks, the road to alienation. Instead she aspires to "the sense that our lives are part of some greater effort, that we are connected to one another," that "we are part of something bigger than ourselves."

This celebration of connections is, in its better passages, a kind of vulgar communitarianism, "community" being one of Mrs. Clinton's favorite descriptions of her desire. She defines community as "a place where we belong no matter who we are." The definition is odd, since membership in a community, as opposed to citizenship in a polity, depends exactly on who you are; but the thinking, again, is thin. "Community" is further conflated with "civil society," which is the vast territory that lies between the individual and the government, "family, friendship networks [sic], communities, voluntary organizations," and it is in this moist space that meaning is to be won. (She does not note that this is the territory that the previous administration called, and was attacked for calling, "a thousand points of light.") But civil society, too, requires "a new definition" and a "reconstruction." Mrs. Clinton's ambitions oscillate between the totalizing and the trivializing. At one point she suggests that nothing less than "remolding society" is necessary, which makes you think, none too gladly, that she is in the business of social engineering. At another point, however, she makes you think that she is only in the business of talking. What the country requires, she concludes, is a new "conversation," indeed "millions of conversations," about "how we break through old views and deal with new problems."

"Millions of conversations," of course, is the most cherished fantasy of Clintonism. This is a talkative presidency. The president seems himself characterized by a horror of silence. (A horror of silence goes well with a horror of individualism.) Often he seems to think that he has acted when he has merely spoken. But Mrs. Clinton's "conversation" is owed to something more than the conviction that talking is being; it is a metaphor for the activity of the mind that has trickled down, or up, from a variety of fashions in academic philosophy, known as anti-foundationalism or perspec-

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tivism or anti-essentialism or pragmatism, according to which truth is nothing more than consensus, which is to say, a communal thing. The old aspiration to objectivity, which was an exercise in exclusion, has been usurped by a new aspiration to solidarity, which is an exercise in inclusion; and where once there were rational deliberations that led to an end, there are now emotional conversations that lead everywhere, and never end. For at least a decade now, we have been hearing from political philosophers and pundits about "the national conversation."

Conversation seems so much more tolerant than ratiocination. It is so respectful, so *nice*. Alas, the great American debates of the last decade, about race, say, or the use of force, have been nothing this lovely; and rightly not, since the realities being debated are pretty brutal. There is no point in looking for consensus where there is no consensus, or where consensus is available only at a level of such generality that it is morally and politically banal. Better, surely, a sharpening of distinctions and a war of ideas, followed by what used to be known as leadership. The problem with conversation as an ideal, in philosophy and in politics, is that frequently it is a principle of stalling. It prefers questions to answers. It is suspicious of decisions and conclusions. It recommends processes and meetings. It is a weapon against urgency. It dreams that there is a bit of truth in everything.

A few weeks after her speech in Austin, Mrs. Clinton gave a speech in Ann Arbor in which she spoke, again and again, the communitarian shibboleth: "the common good." This, no doubt, reflected the instruction of William Galston, a domestic policy adviser to the president, whose influence Mrs. Clinton has acknowledged. A few years ago Galston published an interesting book called *Liberal Purposes*, in which he argued rather trenchantly against the notion that the purpose of the liberal state was to get out of the way of its free citizens, and to be neutral with respect to values. Not only does the liberal state show "a substantive conception of the good," says Galston, it even teaches "liberal virtues" (a notion that was never quite as paradoxical for liberalism as Galston seems to believe). Galston's enumeration of those virtues is an edifying document, though it is finally a little platitudinous: "severe strictures against cruelty and brutality," "an endorsement of the humanitarian disposition," "the vindication of tolerance" and "moderation" are noble and necessary, but they are the stuff of civics, not politics.

The same is true of "the common good." There is no better term for consensus without content. The usage itself is the expression of a counterfeit unity. For there is no common good. There are common goods; but to replace the singular with the plural is to concede the limits of commonality, and the reality of the conflict between the goods for which commonality is claimed. The more concrete the good, the more contested. This does not mean that we are a tragic collection of lost, atomized souls trapped in purposes that cannot be shared. (Anyway, in this century of collectivism and nationalism and ethnocentrism, two cheers for atomism.) It does mean that the communitarian description of a society in agreement with itself is a chimera. Democracy was designed for disagreement; and just as well.

The joke on communitarianism is that the democratic disagreement of America is the work of its communities. The great strain on American society, and on its universalist ideal of citizenship, is coming not from individuals but from groups, from ethnic and racial and sexual groups that live and work and scream in the very space between the individual and the government that the Clinton communitarians exalt. Civil society is a fine place, but it is not a place of peace. The line between pluralism and tribalism is getting harder and harder to see. And for that reason, because we are a nation and not a community, because we are a nation of communities, it is not wise to mock the neutrality that liberalism attempted to instill in the state.

If we cannot rely on the state for neutrality, then surely we can rely even less on the community, which is vital exactly to the extent that it is partial; and on the family, for the detachment that is the emotional and intellectual condition of fairness, we can rely not at all. (For the communitarians, the family is not only a central institution of society; it is also a central metaphor for society.) Is it really from a surfeit of neutrality that the United States is suffering? Is alienation, if it is a recognition of the reality of individuation in oneself and in others, and therefore a foundation for sympathy, really the danger? Is "embeddedness," as the communitarians like to praise the fact of our origination in society, really preferable to getting out of bed? Is belonging really a greater personal and political accomplishment than reasoning?

"It's hard to believe now," writes Amitai Etzioni, "but for a long time the loss of community was considered to be liberating." But nothing is easier to believe, except for those who have never felt the power of tradition's claim upon the self, and never experienced the asphyxiations of authenticity. Etzioni was writing in *The Spirit of Community*, a rather crude manifesto of the kind of communitarianism that pervades the Clinton administration. In 1991 Etzioni and Galston held a conference and published a manifesto and founded a journal called *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*, which last winter offered "recommendations to help ensure that the new president's communitarian spirit will not be suppressed."

Etzioni is the new communitarianism's comic face. He seems to think that he has founded a movement. ("I am quite certain that success has not gone to our heads.... Please do not just read this book. Please try to respond. We in the Communitarian movement are keen to hear from you, and we hope you will tell others about the Communitarian framework.") He, too, seems to think that he is breaking new ground. (The names Taylor, Walzer, MacIntyre, and Sandel do not

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appear in his index.) His book includes discussions of such topics as "Harmonizing Careers and the Communitarian Nexus," which includes observations such as this one: "Lawyers who spend much of their lives *resolving* conflicts between clients will find themselves socially constructive and still able to pay the rent."

This is meliorism for people who have made their money. Which is not to say that the sense of responsibility in America is everywhere robust. The communitarians and the Clintons are correct: it is not. Still, it is hard to see how responsibility can be taught, at least in a democracy, except by reference to rights. And it is a failure of imagination to deny that rights are also an expression of "caring." The rights-mongering of the American left (which was once the calling, by the way, of a lawyer named Hillary Rodham Clinton) is hardly a reason to lose sight of the fact that rights are historical and philosophical achievements. Rights were not always clichés; and sometimes the people of one generation suffer so that the people of another generation will have clichés.

So this is what Mrs. Clinton's sermon on "meaning" means: a spiritual expectation of politics; a romance of the whole, and of the sensation of belonging to the whole; an insistence that cooperation is preferable to competition, and that the institutions of American society will operate best if they operate in this unsolitary, organic mood; a faith in feeling as a guide to political action; a conviction that officials are teachers, and that the true subject of government is goodness. These are not policies, they are attitudes; but they are attitudes that account for policies.

The intriguing thing about people who come to improve the world is their certainty that they can do it. The Clintons, and many of their colleagues, are possessed of this certainty, and of its converse, which is that anything they do, they do to improve the world. The righteousness of the Clintons is a little creepy. (Mrs. Clinton's pronouncements on health care are a fine illustration of what Michael Kelly has called her "politics of virtue." She does not wish to teach how to pay, she wishes to teach how to live. Her war against bad health care is a war against bad habits; and bad habits are other people's habits.) This righteousness sends you searching for its sources, not its psychological sources, but its cultural ones.

I think that I have found one.

II.

> The first step is transformation of the individual. This transformation is discontinuous. It comes from understanding of the system of profound knowledge. The individual, transformed, will perceive new meaning to his life, to events, to numbers, to interactions among people. Once the individual understands the system of profound knowledge, he will apply its principles in every kind of relationship with other people. He will have a basis for judgment of his own decisions and for transformations of the organizations he belongs to. The individual, once transformed, will be able to: set an example; be a good listener, but will not compromise; continually teach other people; help people to pull away from their current practice and beliefs and move into the new philosophy without a feeling of guilt about the past. The word *metanoia* is more suitable than transformation. Metanoia is a Greek word which means penitence, repentance, reorientation of one's way of life, spiritual conversion.

Kierkegaard? Teilhard? Tillich? Cuomo?

Not exactly. Those are the words of the most influential management consultant in the world, the peculiar, austere, and mildly villainous W. Edwards Deming, who is also the most unacknowledged influence on the new thinking about the economic and political culture of the United States. The extraordinary paragraph just cited is a page from a chapter called "A System of Profound Knowledge" in Deming's new book, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education.* The title alone should give warning: this is a way of thinking for which all organizations are like all other organizations, for which distinctions of structure matter more than distinctions of purpose. Or, more precisely, for which there is, in all structures, one and the same purpose. That purpose is "quality."

"Quality," writes Mary Walton, Deming's disciple and the author of *The Deming Management Method* and *Deming Management at Work,* "must become the new religion." Deming is the creator of "the quality revolution" in the theory of management; and not least among the achievements of "the quality revolution" has been its spiritualization of management itself, its promotion of management to "leadership" and to moral authority. "The quality revolution" is generally referred to by its cultic acronym TQM, or Total Quality Management. Deming himself does not speak of TQM, but he begat it, and he is primus inter pares among the "quality gurus" discussed in Peter Capezio and Debra Morehouse's *Total Quality Management, The Road of Continuous Improvement,* a recent manual of the movement.

Deming speaks and writes oracularly of "the Fourteen Points," "the Seven Deadly Diseases," "the Parable of the Red Beads," "A System of Profound Knowledge," "the PDCA [Plan, Do, Check, Act] Cycle," and the like. Born in Wyoming in 1900, he took a doctorate in physics at Yale in 1924 and then distinguished himself as a government statistician; and his teachings display the bizarreness of thought and language that usually characterizes the work of experts turned gurus. Thus, for the observation that "the only test of statistical control on record for results on the speed of light turned out to be negative," Deming cites Ogden and Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning*; and for the "theory of knowledge" appropriate to management, he adduces Lewis's *Mind and the World Order.* Deming's work is riddled with strange adages: "he that sells not can buy not"; "zero defects is [sic] not sufficient"; "a cat is unaware that dusk has settled on the earth"; "life is variation"; "one may learn a lot about ice yet know very little about water"; and so on.

The fundamental idea of this zen for CEOs, of what

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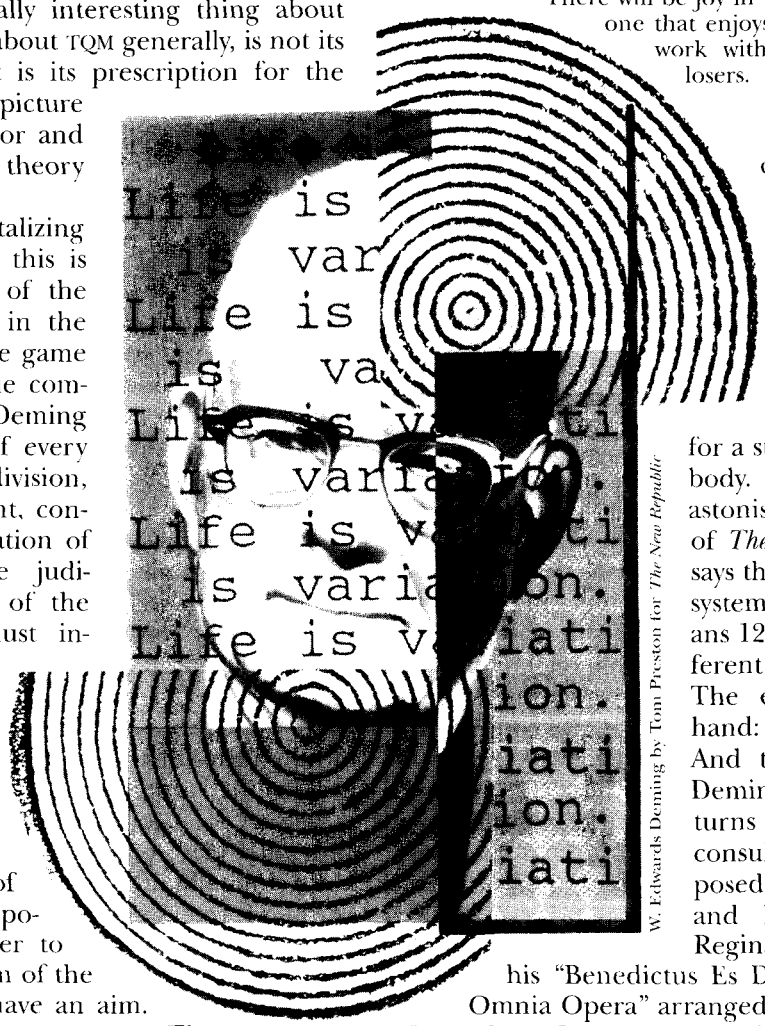
Deming likes to call his "system for win, win," is simple: just as industry can control productivity, industry can control quality; and quality can be mathematically defined, statistically checked, and institutionally encouraged. The idea, I have no doubt, is incontrovertible. (Deming acknowledges his debt to Walter Shewhart, a physicist who worked at Bell Laboratories in New York in the 1920s, who developed what Deming calls "a new way to think about uniformity and nonuniformity," and insisted that "statistical quality control" could be the achievement of the workers themselves.) Yet the really interesting thing about Deming's doctrine, and about TQM generally, is not its insistence on quality. It is its prescription for the emergence of quality, its picture of improved human labor and improved human life, its theory of meaning.

It is, for a start, a totalizing theory. This is not QM, this is TQM. Its pride in one of the most sinister adjectives in the language should give the game away. "Manage the whole company as a system," Deming writes. "The function of every component, every division, under good management, contributes toward optimization of the system.... Enlarge judiciously the boundaries of the system. The system must include the future.... Study the theory of a system." But what is a system? A system is more than a company. A company is only one example of a system. "A system is a network of interdependent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system. A system must have an aim. Without an aim, there is no system. The aim of the system must be clear to everyone in the system." And what is that aim? Deming's definition is purely formal: "The aim must include plans for the future. The aim is a value-judgment."

There are a number of corollaries to this system-worship. The first is that competition is bad, cooperation is good. "The secret is cooperation between components toward the aim of the organization. We cannot afford the destructive effects of competition.... We must throw overboard the idea that competition is a necessary way of life. In place of competition, we need cooperation." Deming's writings are filled with denunciations of competition, of "the evils of the merit system." He is opposed to ranking and grading of every kind, because it sets individuals against each other, and motivates them wrongly, selfishly. In *The New Economics*, there appears this utopian vision of the cooperative "way of life":

> The transformation will release the power of human resource contained in intrinsic motivation. In place of competition for high rating, high grades, to be Number One, there will be cooperation on problems of common interest between people, divisions, companies, competitors, governments, countries. The result will in time be greater innovation, applied science, technology, expansion of market, greater service, greater material reward for everyone. There will be joy in work, joy in learning. Anyone that enjoys his work is a pleasure to work with. Everyone will win; no losers.



W. Edwards Deming by Tom Preston for *The New Republic*

The second corollary of "the new philosophy" is an organic ideal of life, a romanticism for executives and foremen. Deming's metaphors for his anti-hierarchical ideal of human association are very revealing. There is, for a start, the metaphor of the body. In one of the more astonishing pronouncements of *The New Economics*, Deming says that "St. Paul understood a system," and gives I Corinthians 12: "... there are many different organs, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand: 'I do not need you.'" And the evangelical tone of Deming's theory of business turns out to be more than a consultant's faith; he has composed masses and canticles, and last spring his "Missa Regina Coeli" for choir, and his "Benedictus Es Domine" and "Benedicte Omnia Opera" arranged for orchestra, were performed at Constitution Hall in Washington, along with his new melody for "The Star-Spangled Banner." This may account also for his musical metaphors for the perfect institution and the perfect society. At one point he compares a successful system to a string quartet: "Each member supports the other. None of them is there to attract individual attention." At another point he suggests that "an example of a system, well optimized, is a good orchestra." And finally there is (surprise!) the metaphor of the family, rather weirdly put: "Parents cooperate; both win.... Parents will not rank their children, nor show special favors or rewards. Would parents wish for one child to be a loser? Would his brothers and sisters be happy to have a loser in the family? Transformed, the family will be a living demonstration of cooperation in the form of

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mutual support, love, and respect."

The third corollary is Deming's view that management theory is moral theory. There is a scolding spirit, a little reminiscent of George Kennan's, that suffuses Deming's charts and equations and aphorisms. Good products are made by good people. For Deming, America is a decadent society, crippled economically and spiritually by a love of profits. "We have been wasting our natural resources," he writes in *The New Economics*, "and worse ... destroying our people." This is a management consultant who despises materialism. In *The Reckoning*, his account of the American automobile industry, David Halberstam provides this portrait:

> Among the many things that the Japanese liked about Deming was that he lived so modestly.... Here was, to them, the most important man in America living in an ordinary house. The furnishings were simple and the room was rather poorly lit, with a certain mustiness to them. That impressed them all the more. Deming's passion was for making better products, or more accurately for creating a system that could make better products. It was not for making money. He clearly had little interest in material things. He was the kind of American they had always heard about, a spiritual man, not a materialistic one.... [Deming] was often brusque with his fellow countrymen and scornful of them. He hated waste, and he felt that America had become a wasteful country, not only of its abundant natural resources but of its human talents.

The fourth corollary—and the most surprising, perhaps, for those poor souls in government and elsewhere who think that TQM is a democratic program—is Deming's cult of the leader, his cold demand for a concentration of power at the top. This is an anti-hierarchical ideal for the powerful. In the "good orchestra" that Deming admires, the manager is the conductor. In *Out of the Crisis*, his jumbled masterwork that appeared in 1986, Deming writes that "the careful reader may note the use of the word *leadership* where the usual word would be *supervision*. The reason is that for survival, supervision will be replaced by leadership." In *The New Economics*, he writes that "transformation in any organization will take place under a leader. It will not be spontaneous.... The job of a leader is to accomplish transformation of his organization. He possesses knowledge, personality, and persuasive power." And elsewhere, "quality is determined by the top management. It cannot be delegated." (It is in the same absolutist spirit that Deming declares his preference for monopoly, since "a monopoly has the best chance to be of maximum service to the world, and has a heavy obligation to do so.")

This, then, is the brave new world of "quality." In *Brave New World*, indeed, there appears this "solidarity hymn":

> Ford, we are twelve; oh, make us one
> Like drops within the Social River;
> Oh, make us now together run
> As swiftly as thy shining Flivver.

But does better performance really require the oceanic feeling? Does a happy customer really require the surrender of the individual to the group, and to the leader of the group? Does managerial vigor really require an ideology of the anthill and the beehive? Is individualism really the enemy of cooperation? Is pride in the self really the same thing as selfishness? Is the organization, public or private, large or small, really the locus of meaning, the proper site of the profounder life? Does a person's labor really express, how shall we put it, his species-being? (Total Quality Marxism.) Should the alienation of workers really be cured with feudal fantasies, with illusions of wholeness? Instead of looking for "joy" in their drudgery, in their assembly lines and their computer terminals and their connecting flights, they should look for "joy" after and outside of work, where "joy" may be found. And in this family that the corporation and the society are supposed to be, in this family in which the parents are supposed to "win," who exactly are the parents, and why?

It is worth noting, too, the bad faith at the heart of all this righteousness. This gospel of cooperation is designed, after all, to make its converts more competitive. If our goods rout their goods as a result of an improvement in quality, then Deming's doctrines will have been vindicated, at least at the level of economics; but only because they will have been a decisive weapon in a global war. Deming is Darwin with a human face. And there is something, well, rich about the anti-materialism of capitalists. If Deming's program for the American economy works, its result will be profit, not peace. That profit should be shared with the workers who produced the better product; but the hunger of those workers for profit, and for the goods and the services and the forms of ease that profit will bring, is a decent and dignified hunger. It is a part of the American vision of a better life. Money is not a bad thing. It is a limited thing, and it is not a spiritual thing; but it is Deming, and not the blighted producers and concupiscent consumers of America, who insists that capitalism also satisfy the soul.

It will come as no surprise that Deming is a deity in Japan. In 1947 he was recruited by the American authorities in Japan to help prepare a census, and immediately he took an interest in the reconstruction of the Japanese economy. In 1950 he gave a series of momentous lectures on quality control ("my message set forth in 1950, viz., the theory of a system, and cooperation"), in which he promised that his technique would make Japanese products competitive with Western products within five years. It was not long before he became known as the man who made the miracle in Japan, and in 1951 the Japanese government established its most coveted medal for economic achievement and called it the Deming Prize. "We are in a new economic age," writes Deming in *Out of the Crisis*, "created by Japan." The cultural hospitality of Japan to Deming's organicist theory of labor is obvi-

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ous. Deming's industrial utopia amounts to a repudiation of the American liberal tradition.

Against MITI, certainly, one must defend Rawls; and yet the cultural analysis of Deming's success in Japan is a little coarse. What is wrong with Deming's ideas is not merely that they are not, in James Fallows's phrase, "more like us." Indeed, we seem daily and weekly to be more like them. There is no culture in which the one is not tempted to be lost in the many, and the many are not tempted to feel like the one; and there is no culture in which power, in public institutions or private institutions, has no use for those temptations. And so it is a myth that Deming, who received his latest honorary degree at Harvard a few weeks ago, is a prophet without honor in his own country.

The director of a Boston company that produces assembly-line test equipment told a reporter over a decade ago that Deming "has become part of the conventional wisdom." The list of American companies and corporations that have availed themselves of the ideology of quality—Ford, General Motors, Xerox, IBM, McDonnell Douglas, Motorola, AT&T, Federal Express, the Hospital Corporation of America, Florida Power & Light—is very, very long. In a particularly droll example, Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr. is inflicting "the new philosophy" on that well-known *gemeinschaft*, *The New York Times*; a letter was sent to the entire staff of his paper (to their homes, naturally) about "values" and "vision" and "new ways of working together," and it was accompanied by a treacly statement of purpose called "Our Commitment," about "quality," "excellence," "collaboration," "trust," "collegiality," "communication," "receptivity," "candor," "diversity"—and, of course, "profitability." Anna Quindlen told *USA Today*, which is also reforming itself according to TQM, that the devotion of her boss to the methods of "the famous Dr. Deming ... makes a lot of sense," and smugly identified quality with feminism: "I told him [Sulzberger] that this is what we in the sisterhood call female management—non-hierarchical, devoted to a joint effort to produce a product and not toward reinforcing anybody's ego by making them the ultimate decision maker."

This corporate communitarianism is faring no less well in the public sector. American government, too, is caught in its spell. According to David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in *Reinventing Government*, "Total Quality Management, or TQM, has been embraced by public organizations at all levels." (They note, though, that "those that embrace Total Quality Management ... learn that 85 percent of the problems in a typical operation stem from the systems, only 15 percent from the people," and also that "most public sector TQM projects focus on very minor systems, the ones that are easiest to change.") At the local level, the greatest laboratory of "the quality revolution" has been the city of Madison, Wisconsin, whose mayor was transported by one of Deming's lectures in 1984. At the state level, according to Frank J. Mauro, the deputy director of the Rockefeller Institute of Government in Albany, New York, "the current economic squeeze is creating an opportunity to restructure state government," and "dozens of states" are adopting Deming's approach. At the federal level, "the new philosophy" is proliferating rapidly. Osborne and Gaebler report that "the federal government has even set up the Federal Quality Institute to propagate the faith." The United States Navy has a deputy undersecretary for TQM; its well-documented experiment with Deming's notions began in the early 1980s, and by 1988 Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci issued a memorandum to announce that he was "giving top priority to the DoD Total Quality Management effort." The Coast Guard, according to its journal *The Commandant*, has adopted TQM as "its working motto," and established a Quality Management Branch. The Tactical Air Command of the Air Force was restructured by General Bill Creech according to what he calls a "holistic, humanistic kind of TQM," about which he has written a tome that will appear next winter. In 1991, at the invitation of Newt Gingrich, Deming expounded his ideas before "a rapt group of congressmen and their key staffers," according to a pundit who was present, and then lunched with the congressional leadership. In May he was scheduled to bring his seminar again to Capitol Hill, but the seminar was postponed.

Dissolve to the White House.

III.

"The Republicans know business," said a friend of mine who works in the higher reaches of the Clinton administration, "but the Democrats know the new management theories." Her remark had an odd, esoteric tone. (The Republicans know chemistry, but the Democrats know alchemy.) It was when I asked her for an explanation that I first heard about TQM, and by the end of our dinner, which took place a few weeks after "the politics of meaning" had been loosed on America, it was clear to me that I had been vouchsafed a clue to Clintonism, a clue to the ethos of the executive branch. An ethos is something between custom and character; not a system of thought, but a climate of thought; a network of ideas, emotions, and practices that add up to a way of inhabiting the world. The conflation of moralism and managerialism: there, I thought, is the energetic, articulate, and hollow ethos of Clintonism. Total Quality Meaning.

I sought and I found. The administration is lousy with the cult of quality, practically and philosophically. The most dramatic example is the National Performance Review, the extensive evaluation of the structure and the performance of the federal government to which the president has exiled the vice president. It appears to be an orgy of TQM. Its premise, as Clinton said cheerfully in announcing its formation, is that "government follow the example set ... by the many huge private sector companies," a fine Deming-like confusion of the realms. A few weeks

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ago there occurred a "Reinventing Government Summit" in Philadelphia, at which (according to *USA Today*) more than 200 executives "gave Gore tips ... on bringing total quality management to the federal bureaucracy." ("Some of these approaches can do for the government what they did to G.E.," said the man from G.E.) The meetings of the National Performance Review with government workers—I have seen a tape of the encounter at the Department of Transportation—are a strange mixture of personal confession and institutional uplift, exercises in econo-psycho-babble, in which no distinction is drawn between human potential and bureaucratic potential, and management acts pastorally. And the meetings of the Health Care Reform Task Force, a real organizational juggernaut, seem to have the same managerial-therapeutic tone, in which the contradictions between ideas and the contradictions between interests are met by an expression of empathy and a confidence that everything will somehow abide with everything else.

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Then there are Clinton's intellectuals, the theorists of his approach to policy. In *Reinventing Government*, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler admirably distinguish between government and business, which are "fundamentally different institutions," but they conclude that the "different incentives in the public sector" require government to devise its own version of Total Quality Management, which can be "an extremely powerful tool." For Robert B. Reich, "W. Edwards Deming is to management what Benjamin Franklin was to the republican conscience—a guide, a prophet, an instigator." Reich has eloquently propounded his own corporate communitarianism, which he calls "collective entrepreneurialism." It is based on a rejection of "the myth of the Triumphant Individual," which has "outlasted its time" and "is no longer a useful guide to our place in the world." In its place he wants "a different and more subtle form of entrepreneurialism, which builds upon joint effort rather than individual conquest."

The old world of "entrepreneurs and drones," Reich warns, will no longer work; the big ideas of the former can be implemented by anybody anywhere, and the alienation of the latter is not only undeserved, it is also unproductive. An unhierarchical workplace, characterized by "close working relationships among people at all stages of the process," and by "only modest differences in the status and incomes of senior managers and junior employees," or even by employee ownership, in which "tasks are often so intertwined that it becomes impossible to evaluate them separately," and "coordination is achieved both through common experience—working together long enough so that signals are relatively clear—and through common understandings about what sorts of small-scale refinements are likely to improve products and processes," will result in better goods and happier workers; and finally, and grandly, in "a new America."

But how exactly are the workers to find happiness at work? By "discover[ing] ways to improve product and process," writes Reich, by being allowed "to use their imagination," which will in turn allow them "to experiment in rearranging the data to provide new insights into what is being produced and how it can be refined." This, happiness? This, the pleasure of imagining? The spirit sinks. Drones who can compete with Japan are preferable to drones who cannot compete with Japan; but they are still drones. ("Quality is personal," advises *Team USA*, the TQM newsletter at *USA Today*, "and can be very basic: How quickly do you answer the phone when it rings? Are you typically to meetings on time?")

Reich's "collective entrepreneurialism" looks a lot like Taylorism plus computers. Where industrial alienation was, postindustrial alienation will be. It is possible, after all, to be alienated in teams, to be lonely together. Similarly, the rackety Michael Lerner claims to have arrived at his "politics of meaning" as a result of his experience as a psychotherapist at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health in Oakland, where he discovered the dejection of working people; but now

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he publishes a magazine in which private life is referred to as " 'private life.'" This delegitimation of the private realm, and the concomitant attempt to transfer its moral and emotional glamour to the public realm, in the workplace and in the community, is a cruel trick, a collectivist impulse disguised as a form of democratic compassion, a drain on the inner resources of those who need inner resources the most.

And Reich's portrait of individualism in America is a caricature. We were never a nation of pillaging and plundering monads. (Not even in the 1980s.) Self-reliance was never perfect, even in this culture of self-reliance. And individual achievement in America was rarely "individual conquest," except in the sense that an individual conquered his or her circumstances; but the conquering of circumstance is the nurturing of character. Finally Reich himself admits that "collective entrepreneurialism is not as unusual as it may at first seem." Of course it is not unusual: this is a country of associations, corporations, teams, partnerships, movements, companies, unions, communes, boards, federations, councils, brotherhoods, sisterhoods, and so on. What is unusual, however, is the prestige that the flight from individuation has acquired in recent years. This country, its economy and its politics and its culture, will pay a high price for the failure to see that individuation is not only a fact, but also a value; that the individual is the universal, the true universal, the safe universal, the universal that has brought the least tragedy to history.

The public philosophy of the Clinton administration, then, is a wordy and sentimental blend of holisms, of social and economic communitarianisms. (There are ironies, of course: "quality" in government and industry is the way to the future and the friend of "diversity," but "quality" in culture and the arts is the way to the past and the foe of "diversity.") In his acceptance speech after the election, Clinton said that "we need a new spirit of community, a sense that we're all in this together." Soon there followed his wife's homily on the "politics of meaning," and then his defense of it. "You have helped me to clarify my own thinking and to feel a little more convinced to say what I feel," Clinton had written to Michael Lerner when he was governor of Arkansas; and so it was no wonder that he defended his wife's reflections by insisting that American society is marked by "the absence of a feeling that there is an overall philosophy."

For Clinton, though, communitarianism is mainly a method. For the idea of community can make a fear of excluding look like a love of including; and indecision look like a form of tolerance. There is at least one sense in which Clinton's style of politics is not traditional. He does not believe in nothing. He believes in everything. He lives without the law of contradiction. He is not a bad man compromised by lies; he is a good man besieged by truths. The problem is that they are other people's truths. And the problem is also that they cannot all be true. Thus "an overall philosophy" is precisely what Clinton cannot provide, unless it is the sum of everybody else's beliefs accompanied by the abject admiration of belief itself. All this does not mean that Clinton is "post-ideological." Indeed, the controversies of his first months in office should have rudely awakened him to the fact that ideology did not die, at least not here. The country is riven by groups and communities with fierce and divergent views of the world. "Post-ideological," in fact, is a description for philosophical exhaustion; but the majority of the population of the United States does not appear to be philosophically exhausted.

For that reason, Clinton is not equipped to provide the "healing" that this society needs. He is too blurry. He lives at too great a level of generality. This shows in the language of his administration, in all those lofty, unimpeachable, and completely contentless general nouns: "change," "quality," "community," "creativity," "dynamism," "efficiency," "hope," and so on. Clintonism, you might say, stands for excellence at its best. And its conflation of moralism and managerialism enables it also to conflate generality with piety. This administration has a gift for saying nothing, and passionately. Every difference is split, every compromise is made, every opinion is heaped with every other opinion—and the Clintonites still act like crusaders, still speak like the chosen.

There is no surer sign that you feel holy about yourself than to accuse those who disagree with you of cynicism. The accusations of cynicism are flying. According to the president and his wife, and to some of their intellectuals, those who criticize "the politics of meaning" are cynics. Those who criticize the cult of "quality" are called cynics, too. (A few days ago *USA Today* reported that "a deep cynicism across the nation endangers the Clinton administration's effort to 'reinvent government' and run it more like a business, Vice President Gore admits.") So let us be clear about who the cynics are. The cynics are those who believe that all things are true and all policies are possible; that talking is acting; that feeling good is better than thinking hard; that political election is spiritual election; that government is like business; that the moral leaders of this society are its managers; that the working people of this country can suffice with the bliss that they find at work; that individuality is a failing, and the individual should be buried in the group; that the mysteries of human existence are not mysterious; that meaning does not have to be rigorously considered, except for its political and promotional utility. The dogmas of W. Edwards Deming may result in better products, and the flexibilities of Bill Clinton may leave a dent in the deficit and a smaller number of the poor. But they will have banished nobody's loneliness and nobody's darkness. In a vital economy, and a vital bureaucracy, and a vital community, there will still be things that are difficult to know. •

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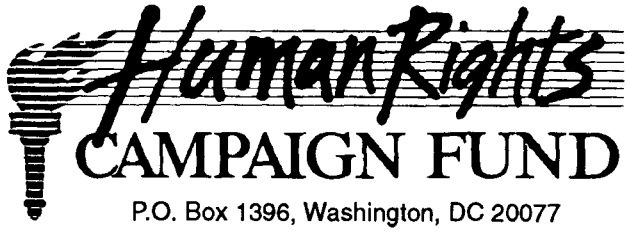

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Familiar Places, Familiar Faces

Agnes Varda has spent her film career following impulses. Of course this is what many filmmakers would like to do; Varda has, in exceptional degree, managed to bring it off.

Paradoxically, most of the films of hers that I've seen have been disappointing. Two exceptions: *One Sings, The Other Doesn't* (1977), memorably poignant, and *Vagabond* (1985), a masterpiece about modern spiritual loss. But many of her films, though plainly the work of a gifted woman, are private inquiries that leave the viewer aloof.

Such is her latest, **Jacquot** (Sony Classics). It's about the childhood and youth of her late husband, Jacques Demy, himself a noted director, and is meant as an idyll of the growth of a filmmaking sensibility. The account takes him through school days and polytech in his hometown of Nantes, through peace and World War II and back to peace again.

The materials themselves are not remote: Fellini used his own versions of them in *Amarcord* and *Intervista.* But Varda's treatment does very little to make the somewhat familiar story seem worth retelling: her touch is not light or fresh or unusually revealing. Add to this the fact that Demy himself, unlike Fellini, is not a really influential figure in film, and *Jacquot* hangs up there on the screen as an exhibit, not an experience.

A contributing factor—diminishing factor, really—is Varda's attempt at the suggestive or symbolic. Much of the picture is in black and white, but she interjects a good many sequences in color. There's no discernible pattern in the use of color: at first we think it's for present-tense comment, but that's not followed through. Then we think color may be used for the theatrical-cinematic themes as against the black-and-white world around them, but that's not followed through either. At last the alternation comes to seem arbitrary, a high-handed poesy intended to make questioners feel like clods.

Varda also insists on some absolute correlations between events in Demy's early years and passages in his films. She links these correlations with a didactic device: a hand painted on a wall points right when we move into a Demy film quotation, and another hand points left when we move back into Varda's film.

Demy died in October 1990, but the film was under way for some time before that. He was interviewed on camera and spoke simply, amiably, about things that mattered to him. We can be glad that he knew the film was forthcoming, but we can also wish that Varda had been able to transmute her enjoyment of family history into less of a private affair.

Do three films make a trend? Well, perhaps they at least justify a comment. In the last few months we've had three films on an old formula, a sentimental attachment between a man and a child: Burt Reynolds's *Cop and a Half,* which I didn't see, *American Heart,* discussed here, and now **Life with Mikey** (Touchstone). The last is about a former child star of T.V., Michael J. Fox, who is an agent for child actors and becomes a sort of foster-pa to one of his clients. Has Hollywood sensed a surge of father-hunger out there?

Nothing else in the film is worth notice except that the director, James Lapine, engaged two well-known playwrights, Wendy Wasserstein and Chris Durang, for minor roles. Other of Lapine's friends and former associates are in the film, and doubtless a good time was had by all. Except us.

In recent weeks, whenever I've been feeling cloudy, a thought has come to cheer me up. Kenneth Branagh exists. Not only has he changed my formerly fixed conviction that Shakespeare cannot be filmed, he has made me happy at having my mind changed.

Now a book arrives—his second, in a way. (The first, a pro-tem autobiography called *Beginning,* is good reading.) This is a tie-in volume with the film of *Much Ado About Nothing* (Norton, 131 pp., $25, $14 paper). It contains the screenplay, a congenial introduction by Branagh (including a witty letter from Lewis Carroll to Ellen Terry about the Hero-calumny plot), thirty-two pages of color photos and some production shots. The book sent me back to see the film again.

It's even better than I remembered. (However, the colors in the theater print seemed less vivid than those in the print at the press screening.) A few

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Guilty As Sin. *Twisty thriller. A lawyer, the feline Rebecca De Mornay, defends an attractive-unbearable man accused of murder, Don Johnson, to the hilt. Sidney Lumet directs sharply. (Reviewed 7/5/93)* **Menace II Society.** *Familiar material—battered and battering black lives in Watts—revitalized by the direction of two 20-year-old brothers, Allen and Albert Hughes. (7/5/93)* **Much Ado About Nothing.** *Once again Kenneth Branagh's adaptation and directing make Shakespeare beautifully cinematic. He and Emma Thompson head a cast that, mostly, sustains the delight. (5/10/93)* **The Music of Chance.** *Wonderfully* right *adaptation of a Paul Auster novel. James Spader and Mandy Patinkin as two men who pay a strange price for losing at poker. Philip Haas directs subtly. (6/21/93)* **—SK**

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small changes or additions of opinion. It's now even more clear that Branagh's astonishing energy—as actor-director—makes him the Atlas on whom this world rests. As for Emma Thompson, I watched her carefully in the scenes where she's only an onlooker and saw how thoroughly she stays *in* a scene without mugging.

Two previously underprized performances: Phyllida Law (Thompson's mother), a woman in waiting, Jimmy Yuill, the friar on whose clarity much depends. If there's such a thing as an increase of blandness, Keanu Reeves and Robert Sean Leonard exemplify it the second time round. Denzel Washington seemed a bit more princely this time yet is not quite up to what he might have done. Michael Keaton is unchanged—still abominable. (Branagh's apologia for Keaton in his introduction cuts no ice.)

Under, beyond and above all is the way that Branagh's direction links the film to what might be called the Shakespearean motion. As does the play, as do almost all of Shakespeare's plays, the film seems to unroll and unroll and unroll, leading us on and on. One doesn't often cry for pleasure at a film. It happened here.

Anachronism Note. Bruce T. Johnson of Mill Valley, California, an admirer of this film, writes to point out two slips. He wonders whether Benedick could have had a lawn chair in Renaissance Italy but is willing to overlook the matter "since Shakespeare himself is guilty of harmless anachronisms." I agree: clocks in ancient Rome, for instance. Then Johnson adds that, early in the film, "we see the women of the estate stripping for their baths. There's a very quick rear view of a deeply tanned extra with a pale white triangle on her backside, clearly the imprint of a bikini bottom." I missed it. My mind was on higher things. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

Unity From Diversity

The contemporary surge in racial, sexual and ethnic consciousness-raising popularly known as "cultural diversity" has resulted in a tremendous outpouring of works by minority artists. Some of these are of genuine significance. Others have importance mainly as calling cards—demands for seats at a national banquet from which a lot of hungry people have long been excluded. And since our liberal culture—amorphous, uncertain and continually in the process of defining itself—is more than eager to welcome new guests to the table, invitations are sometimes extended merely on request.

It is a practice that can lead to confused standards. Funding agencies have started substituting sociological for aesthetic criteria in their grant procedures, indicating that "elitist" notions like quality and excellence are no longer functional. And white male critics are being asked to subscribe to a relativist code that decrees that, not being members of minority groups, they are disqualified from making judgments on minority art (unless, of course, the judgments are positive—separatists rarely refuse praise, prizes and subsidies from the people they claim can't comprehend their work). It's disarming, in all senses of the word, to say we don't share common experiences that are measurable by common standards. It's also defensive nonsense. But the growing number of truly talented minority artists with more universal interests, such as Anna Deavere Smith, John Leguizamo, Susan Lori-Parks, George C. Wolfe and others, suggests that we may soon be in a position to return to a single value system.

Two recent off-Broadway productions reinforce this hope: José Rivera's **Marisol** at the New York Public Theater, and OyamO's **I Am a Man**, which recently concluded a run at the Classic Stage Company. Both are written by dramatists of genuine power and imagination, whose perceptions go beyond sectarian racial or ethnic agendas.

I Am a Man (and in the interests of full disclosure, I should confess that OyamO was once my student) is a rousing play about a strike by Memphis sanitation workers in 1968. I recognize that a docudrama about garbage collectors in the '60s must sound about as intriguing as *Waiting for Lefty*, the '30s agitprop play it most resembles. Two things give it more immediacy than Clifford Odets's obsolete tribute to taxicab drivers: all the Memphis workers were African American, and their strike immediately preceded the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

There is a third dynamic activating *I Am a Man*—the Working Theatre's powerful production under the direction of Bill Mitchelson. Simply set in a confrontational style, the evening has all the color, infectiousness and musicality of a prayer meeting, and it is performed by actors who display an almost familial relationship with the audience, which responds in kind. Beginning with some projected verses by the Greek poet Alceus ("a city stands or falls by its men"), the play proceeds to create a gallery of civic heroes and villains, meanwhile drawing religious analogies between the sanitation workers, some of whom lost their lives under dangerous conditions, and another "garbage collector who died trying to clear away rubbish," namely Jesus Christ. The analogy with Christ is even more striking in regard to King, whose rolling rhetoric, hypnotic voice and saintly image form a ground bass for the action. A projection of da Vinci's *Last Supper* is occasionally illuminated to underline the Easter parallel, foreseen by King himself, when he broke bread with disciples and predicted his own death right before his assassination (in April no less).

King, however, is a background figure until the last few moments of the play. The real hero is T. O. Jones (Paul Butler), who, after founding the union in 1963, was summarily dismissed for illegal actions against the municipality. Jones is far from a spotless figure. His wife kicks him out of the house for philandering, and he grows increasingly self-important as the action proceeds. On the one hand, he is fearless in facing down Memphis's Mayor Loeb, rejecting his bribe of a foreman's job and slapping his face when the mayor calls him "nigger" (Jones's reply gives the play its rather mundane title). On the other hand, Jones is extremely susceptible to the flattery of a Swahili-speaking black militant group called the Invaders (a thinly disguised version of the Panthers). He accepts them as bodyguards and imitates their swagger and salute. Thus the play features a struggle not only between striking workers and city officials, but also between the violent "by any means necessary" tactics associated with Malcolm X and the passive nonviolence of King.

As King prophesies "a storm coming in Memphis," the forces group for battle. A salty representative of the national union, himself a Jew, arrives to confront Mayor Loeb (he calls the mayor a

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"putz" for denying his own religion). He also chides the sanitation workers for scheduling a cold-weather strike, when the garbage is unlikely to rot. The workers are maced, beaten and arrested by rioting police. One man is killed. In this atmosphere of turmoil and hatred, after announcing a massive civil rights demonstration in Memphis, King is assassinated at the Lorraine Motel.

The murder of this "poor dead leader" in the play has all the power and poignance of the episode in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* when Simon Daedalus breaks down over the death of Parnell. In both cases, history was irreparably altered, which is why King's death still evokes the same shock, rage and despair the country felt in 1968. One small victory emerges from this colossal calamity—the union is recognized, the first of its kind in the history of Memphis.

The whole thing is splendidly acted by the entire cast and engrossingly dramatized by OyamO. The playwright's style is at times a little too raw, at times a little too declarative. But he has a sense of balance that puts his play in a class with such discriminating nonfiction studies of racial conflict as Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* and J. Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground.*

Puerto Rican born José Rivera is a rather more sophisticated writer than OyamO. His *Marisol* strives to go beyond documentary realism into spiritual and transcendent realms. Because it features an angel, *Marisol* has been compared to *Angels in America.* There is another striking parallel with Tony Kushner's play: *Marisol* is driven by a similar millenerian imagination, which identifies the year 2000 with events of apocalyptic magnitude.

The action takes place in various boroughs of New York, a city so riddled with frenzied demonic events that it becomes a metaphor for hell (as in Adrian Lyne's brilliant film *Jacob's Ladder*). Marisol, the Latina heroine, is first discovered on a subway, about to be attacked by a mugger wielding a knife. She is saved by the angel, but for much of the play it's uncertain whether or not she's already dead. Back in her Bronx apartment, she festoons her bed with necklaces and jewelry to protect herself against demons, goes to sleep and is informed by her angelic companion that the apocalypse is coming. No one has seen the moon in nearly nine months, and New York will soon experience an "evacuation followed by fire on a massive scale."

The universal body is sick, earth is running a temperature and "God is old and dying and taking the rest of us with Him." It is the angels' job to stop this hemorrhage by declaring war on "our senile God," a heavenly rebellion that will bring on the Millennium. When she returns to her scientific publishing job, Marisol learns of newspaper reports that "Miss Puerto Rican yuppie princess of the universe" (as she is called in the *New York Post*) has been bludgeoned to death. She later encounters a number of even stranger phantasms, all of them caught up in the coming war in heaven.

By the second act, the angels have shed their wings and equipped themselves with tommy guns, while the derelict landscape has been gutted of all civilized forms of life. The city has become a kind of celestial Vietnam with God and the angels in mortal combat, and with all surviving civilians forced to spy for one side or the other. The narrative turns phantasmagoric. One character has been stripped of his skin, another lives on rat poison and all food groups have turned to salt. Although the angels are dying and the rebellion is in retreat, the people start another revolt, and the first day of the new history begins with the rising of a new moon. An angel appears with a crown, and on this qualified note of hope, the play ends.

Some of the writing (particularly the second act) is not perfectly controlled. But much is shot through with a fierce Baudelairean poetry of decomposition. Rivera shares with the later Strindberg not only a passion for new non-material theatrical forms, but also a messianic mission to replace old and dying creeds with vibrant new visions. He represents a bold adventurous talent, and I eagerly look forward to his coming work.

It's a pity that Michael Greif's production muddies the play. Greif, who was expert in directing an efficient piece of machinery like *Machinal,* has turned *Marisol* into an exercise in flashy cyberpunk. His inspiration for the shattered city seems to be drawn from sci-fi pulp movies like *Escape from New York* and *Terminator* and *Terminator 2,* with side glances at *Blade Runner*—generous doses of strobe, laser and thunder effects punctuated by earsplitting rock music—and most of the actors seem to be on speed. Cordelia Gonzalez is an attractive Marisol, with surprised and vulnerable eyes, but she has difficulty maintaining a continuous state of terror, while Danitra Vance, as the angel, is too coolly laid back to be persuasive. The rest of the cast resorts to hysterical shrieking, the new vogue in New York acting these days, which leaves much of the dialogue incomprehensible.

Still, these two dramatists have genuine talent, and they swell the lists of gifted writers still willing to risk careers on our problematic stage. Drenched in their own cultural juices, they are nevertheless capable of telling stories that include us all, thus proving again that theater works best as a unifying rather than a segregating medium. OyamO and Rivera belong to the fellowship of playwrights, which is to say that they transcend ethnic, racial and even national boundaries to join that universal culture called dramatic art. •

The Idea of Elsewhere

BY JONATHAN RABAN

Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life by Andrew Motion

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 552 pp., $30)

To live in England in the age of Larkin was like having a famous bleeding statue on the premises. Once in a blue moon, word went out that a poem was about to surface in the next issue of *The New Statesman, The Listener* or the *TLS,* and within days of its appearance people would know it by heart and be quoting it over the dinner table. I can name precisely where I was (tube train, friend's kitchen) when I first read, on its publication day, almost every Larkin poem between "Dockery & Son" in 1963 and "Aubade" in 1977. Those grimly beautiful later poems are still solid facts of their period, like the three-day week and the falling pound. Larkin's great subject was his own declining bachelorhood, but it seemed that somehow, mysteriously, he had found a way to speak directly to the condition of England as no poet had done since Tennyson. If Larkin's muse (unlike Tennyson's) was usually out on strike, that too was a measure of how

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perfectly in tune he was with his time.

His writing had a Victorian regard for fine (and sometimes ostentatious) craftsmanship. No literary training was required to see that a vast amount of highly skilled labor had gone into the construction of a Larkin poem. Every last tiny piece was an exact fit. Like a brassbound ship's chronometer, the thing ticked and chimed and kept strict Greenwich time. Larkin started out as a novelist, with *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947), and his most despairing poems had the comfortingly busy texture and dependable shape of fireside tales. They swarmed with glistening realistic detail: in a line or two Larkin would re-create a stuffy railway carriage, a vacant room, the wide landscape of a flat county in high summer, and make you see it and smell it on the page. He was expert at the resplendent, transfiguring ending—the ending that sweeps the reader aloft on a rising thermal of grave and formal language:

> ... as the tightened brakes took hold,
> there swelled
> A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
> Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming
> rain.

—or,

> The traffic parts to let go by
> Brings closer what is left to come,
> And dulls to distance all we are.

When it came to the bitter innards of the poems, Larkin had a genius for making his readers feel vicariously brave as they entered a life of such enforced solitude, such unfulfillment, such concentrated horror at age and death that their own lives grew sharply brighter for being lived for a few minutes inside Larkin's. Just as you assented to the intolerable truth of—

> Life is first boredom, then fear.
> Whether or not we use it, it goes.
> And leaves what something hidden from
> us chose,
> And age, and then the only end of age

—so you were reassured by your pleasure in the lines' own patterned eloquence that they were not true; at least, not in your case; not quite yet.

Larkin, the son of an accountant, was a famously tough agent on his own behalf and a shrewd promoter of his literary reputation. Recognizing his scarcity value, he ensured that people never got enough of him. Every once in a long while, he granted an audience to an interviewer. The journalist who traveled up to Larkin's aeric in Hull was met by a well-scripted character whose tone was pitched midway between the reactionary acerbities of W. C. Fields and the self-deprecating complaints of Eeyore the donkey. Pale and flabby, carrying his 230 pounds like a shifting liquid cargo, Larkin was kitted out with two hearing aids and thick specs that served as windows to a house whose interior was hidden in gloom.

Each interview was a studied performance, furnished with all the comic business and split-second timing of an old music hall turn. Larkin would pay off his interrogator with at least one original burnished *mot*, like "Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth"; asked about politics, he'd profess to "adore" Mrs. Thatcher, as on modern fiction he would solemnly advance his admiration for the early and middle-period work of Dick Francis. He was a lugubrious tease. Whenever he struck a memorably philistine note ("*Foreign* poetry? No!") or came across as a blimpish Little Englander, his remarks were treasured as vintage Larkinisms. Had they been made by, say, Enoch Powell or Norman Tebbit, the literary establishment would have deplored them. But made by Larkin, from that dark space deep behind his glasses, and in a voice of mournful plainsong, they were thought ironic and droll, *pure Philip*.

He died in 1985, a beloved national

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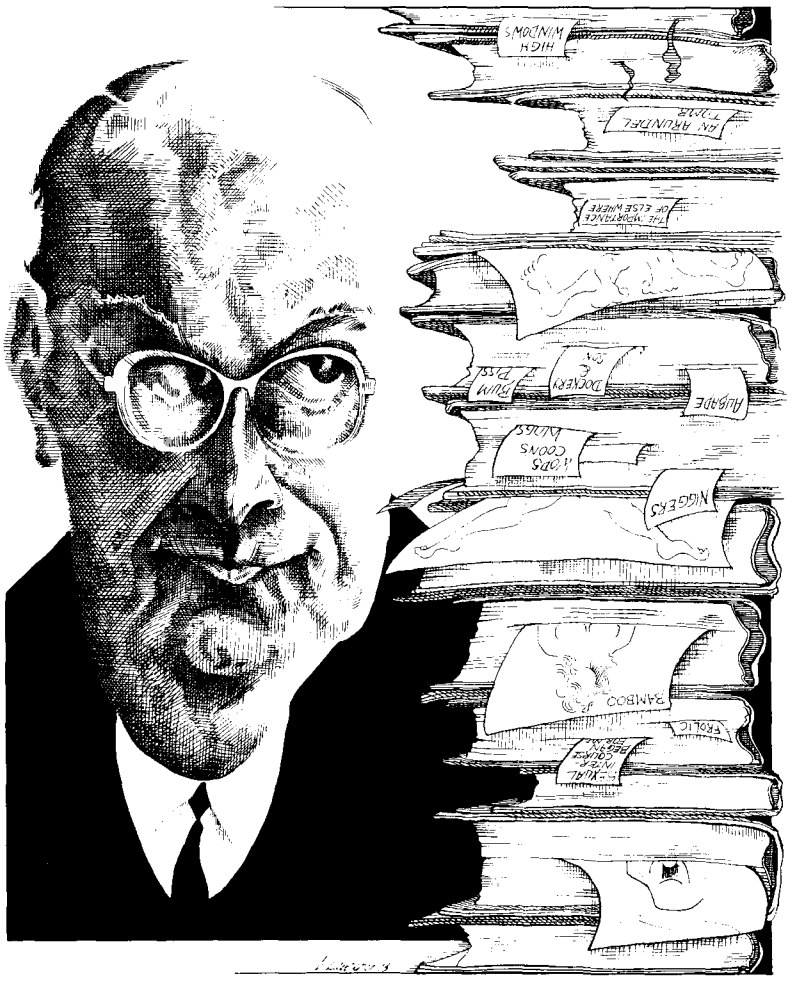
figure. At his memorial service in Westminster Abbey, I was surprised to hear a burbling dean posthumously enroll him—the poet of all our disbelief—into the ranks of the Anglican faithful. Larkin (who called religion "That vast moth-eaten musical brocade / Created to pretend we never die") was, according to the cleric in the pulpit, if not in fact, blah blah, a deeply human man, a deeply spiritual etcetera. This cheeky act of Assumption did at least fairly reflect Larkin's extraordinary centrality in the culture: a man so plainly for England and Saint George would surely be for God as well.

So things rested until the publication in London last October of Larkin's *Selected Letters*, when the miraculous trickle suddenly turned into an ugly hemorrhage. The letters, which will appear here in the fall, are snappishly funny, full of gossip and lively reports from the home front (the library, the literary committees, the lonely evenings with the gin bottle) and, toward the end, harrowing. They're also petulant, smutty and inexhaustibly self-concerned. Even the expected pleasure of seeing Larkin wipe the floor with his contemporaries wears thin when spread over this length and in this quantity: Iris Murdoch, "unreadable"; English poetry since 1960, "horse-shit"; Vikram Seth, "load of crap"; Thom Gunn, "What an ass"; Theodore Roethke, "phoney"; W. D. Snodgrass, "dopy kid-mad sod"; Donald Davie, "tosh"; Geoffrey Grigson, "rotten"; Ted Hughes, "no good at all. Not at all. Not a single solitary bit of good"; Robert Lowell, "never looked like being a single iota of good in all his born days. Lord Hairy's Arsehole. Gibber gibber." The graceless denunciations far outnumber the pretty wisecracks, like Larkin's verdict on Greene: "Good old Graham, always the saham."

In 1978 he wrote to Robert Conquest: "We don't go to Test matches now, too many fucking niggers about." The letters to male friends like Conquest and Kingsley Amis are salted with terms like "wop," "coon" and "wog," just as they are salted with nursery ruderies like "bum," "piss" and "shit"; and in context the childishness of the words counts for a good deal more than their tiresome spray-gun racism. Larkin's alternative conservative manifesto ("Prison for strikers, Bring back the cat, Kick out the niggers—How about that?") and his ditty addressed to H.M. the Queen ("After Healey's trading figures, After Wilson's squalid crew, And the rising tide of niggers—What a treat to look at you") have all the political heft of a preschooler showing off his hoard of dirty words to *épater* the aunties and get in with the big kids. No word was dirtier than "nigger," and Larkin used it extensively to his boys-room cronies, for the usual boys-room reasons.



PHILIP LARKIN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

To the many people who think that no art goes into art (it's just the spontaneous effusion of the personality), it has come as a shock to find that the Larkin of the letters was so much sillier and more mean-spirited than the eloquent and plaintive character whom they met on such intimate terms in Larkin's poems. The sorrowing voice of England-on-the-slide turns out, in 1942 when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, to have been a sneaking admirer of the Third Reich: "Men who can see the right must hold clear from the mass of writhing filth that threatens to engulf us all.... If there is any new life in the world today, it is in Germany.... Germany has revolted back too far ... but I think they have many valuable new habits."

The poet of doleful solitude for whom "Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three / Which was rather late for me" turns out to have been a good deal less deprived of female company than his poems suggest. It emerges from the letters that Larkin's solitude was precariously maintained by the old Don Juan trick of always keeping two, and sometimes three, women on, as it were, the go. When things got too intense with one, he found another to play off against her. In 1966 he wrote to Conquest: "Life is pretty grey up in Hull. Maeve wants to marry me, Monica wants to chuck me." This was how Larkin was usually placed—not quite married and not quite chucked, his precious loneliness threatened but intact.

The most off-putting letters are those that deal—in a tone of dismal giggliness—with Larkin's addiction to illustrated magazines depicting the corporal punishment of schoolgirls. With Conquest, a fellow devotee, he scoured the Soho bookshops for suitably arousing stuff, and traded titles by mail. "*Bamboo* & *Frolic* are the tops, or rather the bottoms: do pass on any that have ceased to stimulate." "*Minuit Cinq* has some good rears in it now and again, and I've taken out twelve months' sub." "I got the pictures—whacko. I admired the painstaking realism of it—I mean, the teacher did really look like a teacher, and I greatly appreciated the school-like electric bell on the wall...."

But even these letters say only what the poems had told us all along: that life for Larkin was a sorry business, mitigated, at increasingly rare intervals, by his gift for recasting it in verse. His poems are triumphant evidence that it

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is possible to make a silk purse from a sow's ear; and it was always our luck that we could read Larkin's life without having to live it.

Now comes another sort of silk purse: Andrew Motion's measured, intricate and quite beautifully written biography. When teaching English at Hull in the 1970s, Motion became a close friend—but not a crony—of Larkin's. A couple of months after they first met in 1977 (Larkin was 55, Motion 25), the subject described his biographer-to-be as "like a latter-day Stephen Spender—very tall, sissy voice, gentlemanly, good-looking, all that. I quite like him." Motion is a poet (most recently, *Love in a Life*), a novelist (*Famous for the Creatures*), a critic (*Edward Thomas*) and a biographer (*The Lamberts*); he is also an executor of the Larkin literary estate. Thirty years younger, well to the left of Larkin in politics and far too modernist a poet for Larkin's taste, he is an ideal foil. Motion is close enough to write intimately of the man, and some of Larkin's best lines here were spoken to Motion in private, in a voice he never allowed his interviewers to hear. Yet he is sufficiently distant to keep Larkin in sharp focus, and his book brilliantly amalgamates the warmth and understanding of the good friend with the necessary cold reckoning of posterity.

Larkin always wanted life both ways—fame and obscurity, sex and solitude—and his chronically ambivalent personality doesn't easily fit the sequential requirements of conventional narrative. There was precious little *and then ... and then* in his life; an inordinate amount of *despite* ... and *however*.... Motion solves this problem by approaching his subject in much the same way that an Empsonian critic might approach a particularly dense and ambiguous poem: he uncovers the paradoxes and the contradictions in Larkin's life, cherishing its contrariety. Doing justice to Larkin's doubleness leads Motion to a style of very nearly continuous antithesis. So, on Larkin's engagement to Ruth Bowman in 1948, Motion writes: "In two minds himself, he would keep his mother and fiancée in two minds as well. By promising his life to both of them, he hoped he might be able to keep it for himself." The twin-bladed eloquence of that phrasing is typical of the book. As Motion teases out this life of unhappy evasions and denials, he proves himself to be a wonderfully subtle and psychologically acute writer in his own right.

The biggest paradox uncovered by Motion is one that no reader of Larkin's poems could possibly have suspected: that the author of "They fuck you up, your mum and dad..." was quite such a chip off the old block. Sydney Larkin, the Coventry Borough treasurer, was eerily like the Hull University librarian—a forbiddingly anti-social man, with a well-developed sense of humor; a compulsive flirt, who pressed his advances on his female office juniors; a great reader, whose library in the early 1930s ran to Lawrence and Joyce. Sydney Larkin's greatest literary enthusiasm was Thomas Hardy—the presiding genius of his son's poems. Politically, he was on the extreme right wing. Probably a member of the British Nazi organization, the Link, he certainly decorated his city hall office with Nazi regalia and kept a statue of Hitler (it saluted at the press of a button) on the mantelpiece at home. At an age when most sons are in revolt against everything fathers stand for, Philip Larkin was (lamely) supporting his father's pro-German views and (passionately) discovering his father's favorite author. "They fill you with the faults they had," says the poem—and not just the faults in Larkin's case, but the tastes, the opinions, the attitudes that until now we had thought eccentrically personal to him.

Larkin's mother, Eva, was a snobbish, sick-headachey doormat. Unintellectual,

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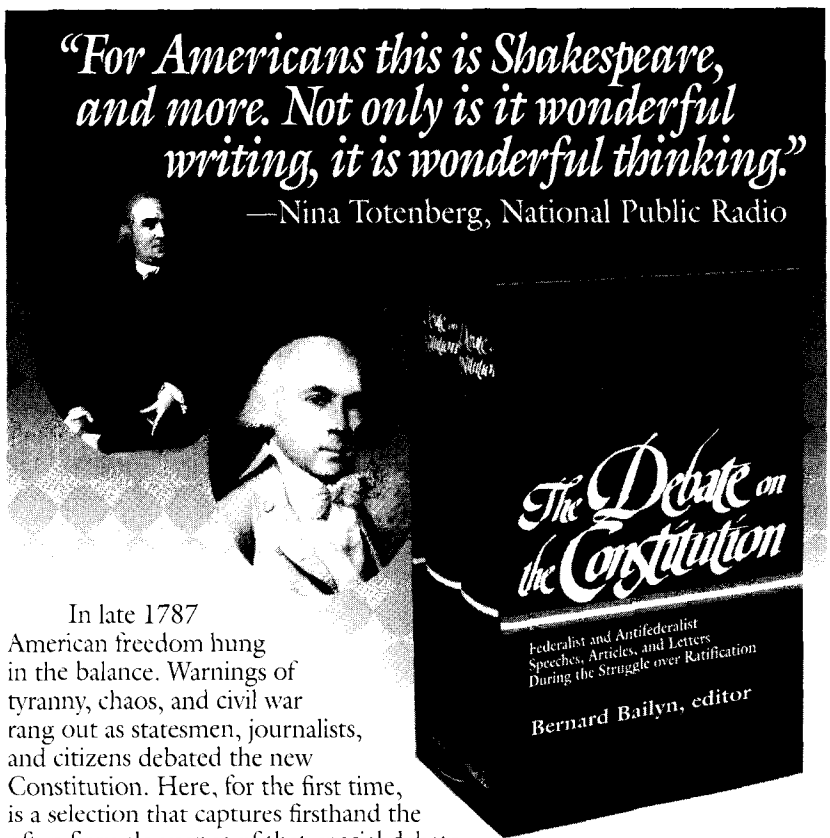
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lacking in everyday vitality (or perhaps just saving it up, since she lived to be 91), her twin driving forces appear to have been a belief in the Larkins' social superiority and a terror of thunderstorms. Growing up in the genteel gulag of his parents' marriage, Philip Larkin acquired his father's ideas, his mother's sense of hereditary specialness and a pathological loathing of family life. It was a mixed glass of blessings: it at once guaranteed Larkin a lifetime of unhappiness and gave him his essential identity as a poet.

From early on, the ordinary pleasures of life made a habit of eluding him. At Oxford, he made passes at girls, but

> every encounter was a disaster. Margaret Flannery, for instance, "edged toward him but made him giggle." Hilary Allen of St. Hilda's upset him by beating him at table tennis. Another girl, when he took her a bunch of flowers, alarmed him so much merely by opening the door to his knock that he was literally unable to speak to her; he thrust the flowers into her arms and fled. A fourth, when he tried to kiss her in a punt, told him, "I'd sooner not, thanks." After this string of defeats Larkin retired hurt, sheltering behind the antagonism which had protected him in the past. "Cunt and bugger Oxford women," he wrote to Sutton ...

He had no better luck with boys. He tried to make love to a medical student at his college (St. John's), who reported to Motion:

> There were a few messy encounters between us, yes. Nothing much. Philip's sexuality was so obscured by his manner of approach and his general diffidence that frankly I would be surprised to hear that he ever had sex with anyone.

Larkin came closest to experiencing requited passion in the solitary pursuit of art—in listening to Count Basie and Sidney Bechet, as in reading Lawrence, Yeats, Auden and Hardy. Even in his 50s, when he was having convoluted (and consummated) affairs with Monica Jones, Maeve Brennan and Betty Mackereth, his preferred form of sexuality was masturbating alone over pictures in magazines.

One of the several themes of Motion's book is how cunningly Larkin came to contrive and to sustain his lonely exclusion from the world. It was often hard work to stay so alone and so unsatisfied, but it was work for which Larkin had an extraordinary talent. From the time he left Oxford in 1943, to take up a magnificently obscure position in the urban district public library at Wellington in Shropshire, he always managed to give himself reason to grieve over being in the wrong place with the wrong person in the wrong era—and, conversely, to be haunted by the brilliant prospect of the counterlife he had thus sidestepped, the happiness he had ensured would not be his.

In "The Importance of Elsewhere," Larkin wrote: "Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home, / Strangeness made sense." The poem is dated June 1955—three months after Larkin left Belfast (where he was an assistant librarian at Queen's University) to take up the job in Hull, where he would spend his remaining thirty years. The last line goes: "Here [in England] no elsewhere underwrites my existence." This wasn't strictly true. His poems are possessed by the idea of elsewhere. Their disappointment with the here-and-now is a rankling homesickness compounded with amnesia: there is no telling where home *was*, precisely, but it is not here. Again and again, they point to the other country of the past, that misty elsewhere, in which things were done differently, and better.

In Ulster, Larkin's true-blue brand of Toryism led him to become a Loyalist, and while there he wrote a curious poem, "The March Past," about an Apprentice Boys' parade. This annual show of Protestant force rouses in him:

> ... a blind
> Astonishing remorse for things now ended
> That of themselves were also rich and splendid
> (But unsupported broke, and were not mended)

His nostalgia is couched in terms so inexplicit that these lines might summon almost anything, from William of Orange trouncing Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne to a mild repining for the glories of country house life in the heyday of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. The essential logic seems to be that things were rich and splendid *because* they are now ended—a thought that often drove Larkin to crocodile tears. In "An Arundel Tomb," he wrote a tender hymn to marriage (an institution that he treated as hell on earth in most contexts), the couple in question having been safely dead for six centuries. In "Church Going," the church becomes an object of fond reverie only after Larkin has emptied it of people, stripped it of its roof and filled it with sheep and mildew in four stanzas of loving ruination.

When Larkin wants to make us feel warm about something, he turns it into history, gangster-style, at gunpoint. The sepia photo of grinning young men standing in line to enlist for service in the Flanders trenches ("MCMXIV") brings out an upwelling of sweet sorrow ("Never such innocence, / Never before or since ...") because we know the men are very shortly going to be blown to smithereens—as in "The Explosion" we weep for the miners, seen in the fullness of their lives just at the moment when the fatal tremor shakes the pithead village. As the young man opens his fist to show a clutch of unbroken larks' eggs, he's—history.

The mysterious and lovely ending to "The Whitsun Weddings" delivers more death on a grand scale. Motion reveals that the image of the "arrow shower / Sent out of sight" was prompted by a visit to the cinema (with Monica Jones) to see Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*. We are at Agincourt, the English archers have just loosened their bows, and a lot of French peasants are going to snuff it when the shower turns into rain at the other end of the battlefield. So the luckless honeymooners are in for it, their great day made poignant by the doom that is being planned for them in the poem's final lines.

One cannot help being reminded of the way that Larkin felt about people like this when they were alive, with no immediate prospect of extinction. "I want to see them starving, / The so-called working class, / Their wages weekly halving, / Their women stewing grass ..." Dead, they became legitimate objects of sentimental feeling, material for Larkin's peculiar kind of taxidermal elegy.

His rare attempts to find something to celebrate in contemporary England tend to fall flat. The 1973 poem "Show Saturday" is like a big, crowded, somewhat overcolored canvas of a Suffolk horse fair by Sir Alfred Munnings; a craftsmanly re-creation of a country show, complete with farmers, craft and produce stalls, pony-club children, wrestlers, chainsaw contestants and "mugfaced middleaged wives / Glaring at jellies" ("wives" always get it in the neck in Larkin's work, like the "unspeakable wives" in "Toads," the "grim headscarved wives" in "Here" and the "bearded wife" in "The Dance"). The show is the backbone of rural England, the Tory Party taking a well-earned day off, and Larkin here is in an uncharacteristically expansive mood as he shepherds the poem to an uplifting envoi:

> Let [the show] stay hidden there like strength, below
> Sale bills and swindling; something people do,
> Not noticing how time's rolling smithy-smoke

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Shadows much greater gestures; something they share
That breaks ancestrally each year into
Regenerate union. Let it always be there.

It is a rhetorical collapse. Motion suggests that the passage is charged with a private double meaning: Larkin visited the Bellingham Show in Northumberland with Jones, and the "regenerate union" is as much his and hers as it is that of the good people of England. Yet even if one glosses it with this in mind, the last sentence strikes a wan and hollow note. The show, with all its bright and noisy quiddity, simply won't perform the solemn function that Larkin assigns to it, and the end of the poem only serves to remind one of how very deeply affirmation goes against Larkin's grain.

What he excelled at was a kind of acrid self-cancellation. In the conduct of his life, whenever he made an emotional move, he quickly rescinded it. Motion's account of why Larkin began an affair with his secretary, Betty Mackereth, in 1975, shortly after Maeve Brennan, a library junior, had at last consented to go to bed with him, is to the point here (read as if these were characters in fiction, it is also extremely funny):

> As Maeve finally yielded, her romantic elusiveness was destroyed and his attraction to her was bound to diminish. Furthermore, the sacrifice of her religious principles raised again the specter of marriage—for Larkin at least, if not for Maeve herself. He felt that he had set in train a series of obligations which were likely to lead to the altar. There were other kinds of frustration as well. Because he and Maeve went to bed—even in their new, revitalized relationship—only on "*very* rare and isolated occasions," Larkin's sexual appetite was stirred but unsatisfied. By turning to Betty he was therefore taking for himself while giving of himself—not only gaining his pleasure but securing his independence. Betty reactivated the dramatic struggle between life and work on which his personality had always depended.

One can watch Larkin going through the same canny hoopla in his letters: a warm and appreciative letter to X is followed, often on the same day, by a warm and appreciative letter to Y in jeering dispraise of X, and so on. Bad faith was a form of good faith; it meant that Larkin was still keeping his options open. As he wrote in "To My Wife" (1952), "Choice of you shuts up that peacock-fan / The future was...." Even as the fan faded from peacock to molted starling, Larkin set great store by refusing to close it.

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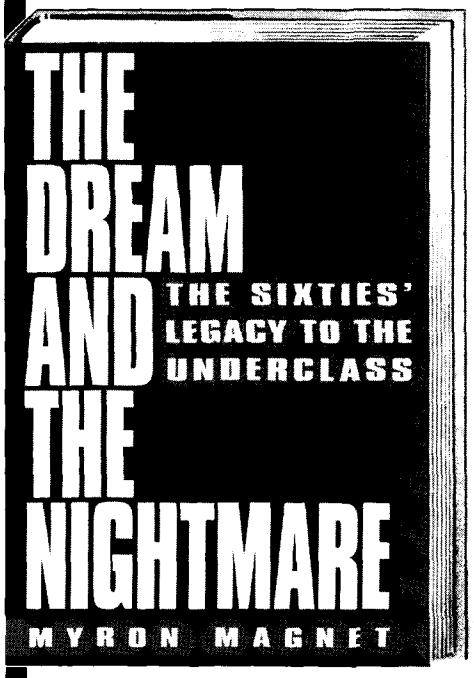

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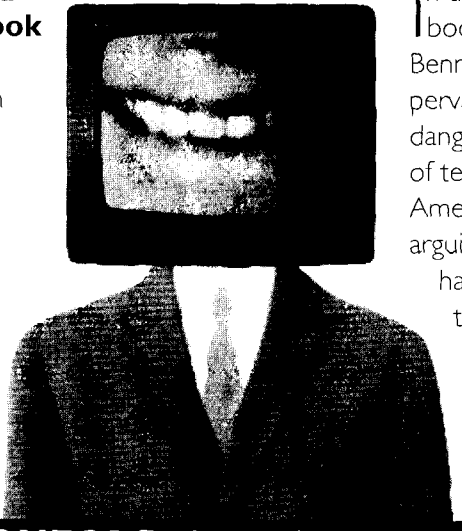

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the work. From early on, the shit-and-piss talk, with which Larkin regaled the boys in his letters, began to enter the poems as the language of life: nasty, brutish and four-lettered, to be set against the solemn Tennysonian idiom of art. In many of his best poems there is an exquisitely delicate balance between an interior voice, thinking aloud in the rarefied silence of the lamp-lit study, and the demotic voices—rude, inconsequential—of the street outside. Art is pitched head-on against life, and there is the teasing possibility in all these poems that art may lose—that the poem may become swamped in chatter, or in scatology. When "The Whitsun Weddings" was about to be broadcast on the BBC in 1959, Larkin warned the radio reader:

> Success or failure of the poem depends on whether it gets off the ground on the last two lines. It is asking a lot of a reader, I know, to achieve a climax in so small a compass, but unless this image succeeds with the listener I am afraid the poem will seem no more than pedestrian.

The narrowness of the triumph—the against-the-odds transcendence of art over life in that last-minute swoop—made the poem. Larkin here was playing a dangerous game brilliantly.

By the time his last collection, *High Windows*, was published in 1974, it had ceased to be a game. The poems had turned into battles between a life that was increasingly frightening and disgusting and an art that was increasingly fine-spun and febrile. One after another, the poems start in low demotic—the language of intolerable life: "When I see a couple of kids / And guess he's fucking her and she's / Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm . . . "; "What do they think has happened, the old fools, / To make them like this?"; "Jan van Hogspeuw staggers to the door / And pisses at the dark . . . "; "They fuck you up your mum and dad"; "Groping back to bed after a piss . . . "; "Sexual intercourse began / in nineteen sixty-three"; "*My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps / To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps / You'd care to join us?* In a pig's arse, friend. . . ." From these desperate and squalid beginnings, the poems climb, against all likelihood, to heights like the tragic serenity attained at the end of "High Windows" (which begins, "When I see a couple of kids . . . "):

> Rather than words comes the thought of high windows;
> The sun-comprehending glass,
> And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
> Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

Poems don't get much closer to miracles than that.

Andrew Motion has some unsettling news about "High Windows." Larkin finished the poem in February 1967, working from a draft he had written in the spring of 1965. The draft ending ran:

> Rather than words comes the thought of high windows
> The sun pouring through plain glass
> And beyond them deep blue air that shows
> Nothing, and nowhere, and is endless
>
> and fucking piss.

The three words jeer desolately at the lines immediately above them on the page. *Larkin—horse shit. Gibber Gibber.* His later work bears the message that poetry can be made out of a sour and unsatisfied life, but it comes with the self-lacerating caveat that no poetry is so secure that it can escape the suspicion of being a rhetorical trick, a phony prettying-up of the life it purports to transfigure. In this tormented mistrust of his own art, at least, Larkin was an exemplary modernist.

After his death, two women each believed that the poem "When first we faced, and touching showed . . . " was meant for her alone, and one of them, Maeve Brennan (who worked with Larkin for thirty years and whose affair with him lasted for seventeen), said to Motion, "I wonder whether I really knew him at all. He had feet of clay, didn't he? Huge feet of clay." The author of *The Less Deceived* maintained his sacred privacy behind a fence of interlocking betrayals and evasions—and it was no wonder that he came to fear that the person most deceived by these stratagems had been himself.

The solitude that he spent a lifetime dodging and lying to keep intact was always solitude for art's sake—time "repaid / Under a lamp, hearing the noise of wind, / And looking out to see the moon thinned / To an air-sharpened blade." For the bargain to work, there had to be an unfinished poem under that lamp; but after the publication of *High Windows*, the desk was nearly always empty, and the poems that did occasionally appear there were rarely among Larkin's best. The strikes and counter-strikes of life and art in *High Windows* had taken Larkin to the brink of paralyzed silence. Out of this impasse came one magnificent poem—"Aubade," begun in 1974 and finished in 1977.

An *aubade* (dawn serenade) is an early morning poem in which the writer parts with his mistress after a last night of love. Larkin's 4 a.m. *aubade* is a desperate and hungover leave-taking from life and art:

> . . . this is what we fear—no sight, no sound,
> No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
> Nothing to love or link with,
> The anesthetic from which none come round.

The poem makes plain that, more than almost anyone alive, Larkin knew what being dead was like. It was in writing that he was able to think and link, and death presented itself to him as a kind of eternity of writer's block, a state of unbeing with which Larkin had long been miserably familiar.

> Most things never happen: this one will,
> And realization of it rages out
> In furnace-fear when we are caught without
> People or drink. Courage is no good:
> It means not scaring others. Being brave
> Lets no one off the grave.
> Death is no different whined at than withstood.

In a letter to Barbara Pym, Larkin described "Aubade" as "the death-throes of a talent," and though the phrase is meant to come across as mournful-jocular, Larkin in his Eeyore mode, it tells the exact truth about what the poem does.

Larkin was always scared that the bargain he had made was a bad one. As early as 1966, he was confessing to Monica Jones:

> I feel I am landed on my 45th year as if washed up on a rock, not knowing how I got here or ever had a chance of being anywhere else. . . . Of course my external surroundings have changed, but inside I've been the same, trying to hold everything off in order to "write." Anyone would think I was Tolstoy, the value I put on it. It hasn't amounted to much. I mean, I know I've been successful in that I've made my name & got a medal & so on, but it's a very small achievement to set against all the rest.

Fifteen years later, or thereabouts, he told Motion: "I used to believe that I should perfect the work and life could fuck itself. Now I'm not doing anything, all I've got is a fucked-up life." Both these verdicts cry out to be contradicted, but the reader, balancing Larkin's poems with his letters and his life, is likely to find them wretchedly hard to gainsay.

JONATHAN RABAN's most recent book is *Hunting Mister Heartbreak* (Harper Perennial).

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Saddam's Scribes

By Martin Kramer

Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World by Kanan Makiya

(W. W. Norton, 367 pp., $22.95)

Since the war in the Gulf, it has been learned just how thoroughly Saddam Hussein beguiled public servants, business executives and policy "experts" in the West. Here are the officials who winked at him; there are the corporations that provisioned him with forbidden technologies; and everywhere are the "Iraq-watchers" who put the best face on his damnedest deeds. The techniques of seduction mastered by Iraq compel investigation, because they point to gaping loopholes in the institutions that define Western democracy, loopholes that probably can never be closed but must certainly be tightened if more Saddams are not to waltz right through them.

In the Arab world, too, Saddam had his apologists and his appeasers and enjoyed the support of an impressive array of fellow travelers. Especially among the intellectuals: when the crisis came, they deployed all their ingenuity to excuse or to justify the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and seeded the clouds of obfuscation surrounding Saddam's crimes. Their choices before and during the war made no difference to its outcome, and might still be only an internecine Arab concern, were not yesterday's allies of Saddam posing as today's defenders of democracy and human rights in Arab lands. Kanan Makiya's unsparing exposé will make it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for them to get away with it.

Makiya is the Iraqi author of an earlier indictment of Saddam's rule called *The Republic of Fear*, which he published under the pen name Samir al Khalil. There he argued that Iraq under Saddam "should not be dismissed as a run-of-the-mill dictatorship with equally nasty counterparts all over the Third World," since it had become, in the 1980s, a totalitarian state. After the invasion of Kuwait, Makiya shed his protective pseudonym to argue publicly that the West had an obligation to topple Saddam. The West did otherwise, for reasons that betrayed what Makiya calls an "absence of compassion."

Makiya's new book does not dwell on Western "betrayal," real or imagined. His critical eye remains fixed on the Arabs. For Makiya, the torment of Iraq, and of other Arab lands, is largely self-inflicted, the result of a descent into cruelty that the Arab intelligentsia has greeted more often with silence than outrage. Makiya's work purports to be a kind of shock therapy, which seeks to relive with readers the nights of terror and to confront intellectuals with the human cost of their words—all in the fervent hope that Iraqis and other Arabs will take responsibility for the cruelty that they have visited upon one another.

The therapy begins, appropriately, with the telling of lived nightmares. Each of the first chapters bears the name of a witness who felt the hot iron of Saddam's wrath. They include a Shiite, a Sunni, two Kurds and a Kuwaiti: witnesses who passed through the bowels of Baathist Iraq, even as Arab writers and poets kissed Saddam's cheeks. There is the interview with the Kurdish boy Taimour, who somehow pulled himself from the pit where Iraqi soldiers shot his mother and sisters; the regime exterminated over 100,000 Kurds in this manner in 1988. There is the testimony of Abdallah, a Kurd who lived through a chemical attack on his village that same year. Fleeing to the river, he found his children dead and his mother sprawled in the water, her mouth "biting into the mudbank." There is Omar, a Sunni from Baghdad, who was swept into a hellish prison for forty days on suspicion of insulting Saddam. There is Abu Haydar, the Shiite army officer who joined the postwar Shiite uprising in the south, only to see it descend into butchery and looting before being crushed.

The testimony of these witnesses is the scaffolding for Makiya's own detailed inquiries, drawing on a still wider range of interviews, documents and tapes. The narrative is inspired as no human rights report could be, and is leavened with personal reflection on the moral ambiguities of tyranny and resistance. This is

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especially true of Makiya's account of the Shiite intifada, an uprising put down with a ruthlessness "that previously had been reserved for the Kurds." It is believed that many more Iraqis died in the suppression of the Shiite uprising than in the allied assault on Saddam's forces. But Makiya does not shrink from documenting the excesses of the "bungled" intifada, which turned into a "killing rampage" borne aloft on "a ferocious, hate-filled, vengeance-seeking and profoundly intolerant brand of Islam." His reportage of the atrocities, on both sides, runs the grisly gamut from crucifixions to the dashing of infants' skulls.

Makiya found "the cumulative effect of the stories unbearable, deadening to all rationality, even a threat to my own sanity." Yet this brutalization, far from galvanizing an Iraqi opposition, has paralyzed it, as each faction claims to have been more victimized than the others. Makiya is certain Saddam will fall but fears a bloodbath will follow. He would heal the polity by a general amnesty, a federal state and ironclad guarantees of minority rights.

But the Kurds dream of a Kurdish state and the Shiites call for an Islamic state, "either one of which is enough to kill Iraq." The Kurdish dream might be realized with a little more bloodshed, or so Makiya imagines; but Sunnis and Shiites live in an inextricable embrace, and when Shiites talk of an Islamic state, Sunnis hear a demand for righteous vengeance. Makiya, himself a Shiite, ends his reflections on Iraq's future with an admonition to Shiites that they approach Sunnis in a spirit of reconciliation, abandon the idea of an Islamic state and promise to set aside retribution after Saddam. But Makiya has no illusions: "The signs are that Iraq's Shiites are so traumatized by their own tragedy that they are becoming less and less able to think and act like Iraqis." As costly as Saddam's rule has been for Iraq, Makiya is possessed of a foreboding that the deluge is yet to come.

In the second part of the book, Makiya dissects the intellectuals. Since 1967 most have known the Arab world to be ailing, and many have offered penetrating diagnoses. They affirmed that the Arabs must change and pondered the violence and the repression played out in Beirut, Hamah and Halabja. And yet they failed to liberate themselves from the myth of Arab nationalism and its crippling fixation on the West as the ultimate source of all Arab woes. That myth finally overpowered every other sensibility when Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait—a union unlike any other attempted Arab union, imposed by the strong upon the weak, with all the brutality of a rape.

Scores of leading Arab intellectuals embraced the move openly or tacitly, by somehow persuading themselves that Iraq's missiles and chemicals stood at the service of all Arabs. If Saddam's brutality served to unify them, then it had to be understood as a "national act." Later, when America awoke and Saddam suddenly seemed destined for defeat, they made him into an Arab victim, charging that the United States lured the Iraqi leader into Kuwait in order to crush him. (April Glaspie was the agent provocateur.) The imagined plot then called for the United States to destroy any possibility of a so-called "Arab solution," so it could wage a cathartic war of prejudice against Iraq, Islam and the Arabs. In short, writes Makiya, "responsibility was being transferred by Arab intellectuals away from where it so obviously lay, namely, with the Ba'thi state of Iraq, onto the United States."

Makiya has made a collage—a quote here, a verse of poetry there—and he tends to relegate evidence of equivocation to the footnotes. Still, many of the quotes are stunning. Pride of place on the scale of power worship goes to the Tunisian historian Hichem Djait, who enjoys an exalted reputation in France and a growing one in North America (where he has been a visiting professor at Berkeley and McGill). "A new perspective is opening up," he announced after the invasion of Kuwait, "that of unification. And Iraq is its pole and motor." Just as wars forged European nations, so Saddam was "undertaking the beginning of the unification of the Arab world. Sometimes legitimacy is more important than legality."

His foreign interviewer persisted: What if the war became general? Djait's reply was that "war has the merit of clarifying things—with respect to your contradictions and with respect to ours. We have everything to gain from this clarification. We have nothing to lose from this war, even if it ends in defeat." This very same Djait once said of Baathist ideology that "the Arab nation is not a fact," and that "intellectuals cannot, without betraying themselves, subscribe to a purely nationalist ideology that is fatally poor and contains the seeds of fascism"; but when Saddam flexed his missiles, Djait swiftly betrayed himself, and watered those seeds with his words.

Makiya's view of the poets, the "kings of Arab culture," is more problematic. The spectrum of plausible interpretation is broad, and the poets are in perpetual motion. In 1984 Nizar Qabbani, the lyric poet of pessimism from Syria, wrote a paean to Saddam, "who let gently drop into my eyes the color of green." Later, in 1989, he wrote a poem that fed the already widespread Arab bigotry against the Arabs of the Gulf ("Drink the wine of your petroleum to its lees / Only leave culture to us"). Yet Makiya acknowledges that Qabbani took an "honorable stand" in support of the Kuwaitis during the crisis and penned a poem that heaped obloquy on Saddam after the battle. Makiya argues that Qabbani's problem is ultimately "one of style, not ideological position," and no doubt Qabbani is an acquired taste. But Makiya never confronts the paradox of how a poet, whose style reminds him of nothing so much as "early Baathism," still withstood the siren call from Baghdad at the height of the crisis.

The poets equivocated; not so the Palestinians. Saddam seduced them first by exchanging threats with Israel, and later by promoting the idea of "linkage." The depth of Makiya's disappointment with the Palestinian choice is perhaps explained by his own odyssey. After the 1967 war, the Palestinian fedayeen became the hope of the hour, and Makiya writes of starting off in politics as a "young activist supporter" of the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. "As I labored virtually full time to solidarize with the Palestinian movement, I became aware of myself as an Arab for the very first time." But the wider Palestinian movement did not arise to inspire young idealists or to save the Arab world. It arose to carve out a Palestinian state, and its natural allies were the power brokers, not the downtrodden, of the Arab world.

Saddam seemed to command more power than any Arab leader in modern history, and when he invaded Kuwait, Palestinians rushed to savor what Makiya calls the "crumb of comfort" that he threw to them. Makiya notes the exceptions, which include the Israeli-Palestinian writer Emile Habibi and the Harvard professor Walid Khalidi. But most Palestinian intellectuals saw Saddam as the revered Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish described him in 1986: as the "moon of Baghdad." Makiya's mature disappointment with the Palestinians has been as passionate as his youthful "solidarizing," and one wonders whether the Palestinians really have deserved either. But if Palestinian intellectuals are now enraged by Makiya, they might ponder whether their own style of moral arbitrage did not create him.

During the Gulf war, Edward Said demonstrated that style brilliantly. From the outset, he decided that the crisis was

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about empire: not Saddam's, America's. Were Kurds gassed? "At best," pronounced Said in the face of an avalanche of evidence, "this is uncertain." But he dropped the evidentiary bar when it came to American culpability, as demonstrated by his remarkable summation of the Gulf war: "The dreadful Saddam Hussein provided the U.S. and his reactionary Gulf neighbors with a perfect excuse to attack him after his brutally stupid and indefensibly criminal occupation of Kuwait." The real thrust of this sentence is not that Saddam was dreadful, stupid or criminal, though it is clear on all those counts; it is that the United States and Saudi Arabia plotted to "attack" Saddam before he invaded Kuwait. But the evidence for this simply does not exist. And the mountain of counterfact about Iraq, Saudi Arabia and American policy-making that must have gone into the writing of such a sentence is breathtaking.

For Makiya this kind of logic is grounded in the "morally wrong" premise that the greatest threat to the Arabs is still external. As Makiya demonstrates in a final tour of cruelty around the Arab world, the region has become fully self-sufficient in the manufacture of oppression. Yet Makiya's indictment of the Arab intellectuals goes further: they create the necessary conditions for tyranny. The source of agony in the Arab world, writes Makiya, "lies principally in its intelligentsia, not in its regimes." Here he invokes the authority of Noam Chomsky, whose notion of the responsibility of intellectuals entered the Arab world through the criticism of "Orientalism." Makiya skillfully hurls it right back: if Western culture and Western power are inseparable, so too are Arab culture and Arab power, especially when that power is so abused.

But here Makiya stands on dangerous ground. As it is, the rulers of Arab and Islamic lands need little encouragement to hold intellectuals responsible, and to hold them to the fire. That is why books are banned, writers are exiled, journalists are assassinated and Salman Rushdie languishes under an irrevocable fatwa of death. In places like Baghdad and Tehran, the "treason of the intellectuals" is judged to be treason, pure and simple. The Arab world desperately needs to ignore the Chomskian analysis, and to write a social contract that absolves intellectuals of this kind of accountability for what they write and say. Such a contract might be based instead on the idea that governments are accountable for what they do.

Astonishingly, the very same nationalist intellectuals who, in Makiya's words, "played into the hands of the worst kind of despotism" propose to write that contract themselves. The pan-Arab journals now brim with articles, conference proceedings and study group reports on methods and means of promoting democracy in the Arab world. The rationale underlying this sudden enthusiasm for political pluralism and free elections is that if the people were only allowed to express themselves, they would endorse the nationalist program: greater Arab unity, repudiation of the United States, withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli peace process. It is a dubious assumption, and it is not surprising that half of the Arab nationalist intellectuals in a recent survey believed that Arab unity could only be achieved by force. Their lips speak democracy, but their eyes remain fixed on the horizon, awaiting the next Saddam, who may turn out to be Saddam himself.

MARTIN KRAMER is associate director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University.

Unnatural Law

BY SANFORD LEVINSON

The Partial Constitution by Cass R. Sunstein

(Harvard University Press, 414 pp., $35)

Cass Sunstein's important book appears after the inauguration of a Democratic administration headed by a "new liberal" who, by training and apparent inclination, is much taken by law and by lawyers from elite law schools. *The Partial Constitution* is now, among other things, a memorandum to the White House about the way that "new liberals" (in whose camp Sunstein would count himself) should respond to the unexpected opportunity to reshape American constitutional doctrine.

The core of Sunstein's argument is a relentless attack on what he calls "status-quo neutrality," the temptation to view "existing distributions of property, income, legal entitlements, wealth, so-called natural assets and preferences" as in some way the "natural order of things," and therefore protected against attempts by the state to reorder them. Indeed, the existing distributions provide what Sunstein terms a "baseline" against which deviations are measured (and usually found wanting).

Such "naturalization" was at the heart of the conservative invalidation of much early regulation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1905, for example, a Supreme Court majority described a New York law limiting the work week of bakers to sixty hours as a "meddlesome [and therefore decidedly un-neutral and unconstitutional] interference" with the natural, and presumably neutral, liberty of consenting adults to make whatever contracts they wished. New York described its law as a protection of the bakers' health; the majority, however, instead described it as a "partial" (as distinguished from "impartial") attempt by the legislature to help the nascent labor movement.

Undergirding this decision in *Lochner* v. *New York*, the reaction to which has dominated constitutional theory for the entire twentieth century, was a fear that new political movements in America, including socialist ones, were about to capture political power and would use that power in behalf of similarly "partial" assaults on the sacred rights of property. For the majority, though, the Constitution could serve as a shield protecting the ostensibly natural rights of liberty and property against the depredations of a tyrannical, property-poor majority.

Sunstein shares the vision of a Constitution that limits the power of political factions to use the state for their own "partial" purposes. For him the Constitution prohibits what he calls "naked preferences" by the legislature that are nothing more than attempts by majorities to reward their friends and punish their enemies. Sunstein views the Constitution as requiring a measure of "impartiality" from legislatures. He does not at all share, however, the *Lochner* majority's faith in the impartiality of existing baselines and the devotion to protecting them in the name of neutrality. Indeed, a central aim of his book is to awaken his readers to our continuing reliance on existing baselines to provide a (falsely)

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neutral point from which to assess the legitimacy of social policies.

For Sunstein, "existing rights, and hence the status quo, are in an important sense a product of law," no more "natural" (or insulated from the play of political power) than are the more visible reorderings of rights mandated by legislatures. The status quo is simply the congealed and unselfconsciously endorsed result of earlier political decisions made by those with power. Property rights, from this perspective, are simply a "delegation" from the state to the citizenry of the ability to control certain objects, including land. They must be subjected to critical evaluation rather than thoughtlessly reaffirmed.

As Sunstein notes, his argument is not at all original. He is simply the latest of a group of leftish scholars who have revived the central insights of early twentieth-century American Legal Realism. Thus Sunstein quotes Robert Hale, an important economist of the 1920s, who argued that "the dependence of present economic conditions, in part at least, on the government's policy concerning the distribution of the public domain, must be obvious. Laissez-faire is a utopian dream which never has been, and never can be, realized." Or, as Sunstein puts it, "common law rules," that is, the great patterns of the law as discerned by judges, "did not merely describe a pre-existing set of categories; they were human devices that created the very categories through which judges perceived legal and social realities."

The most striking example of the formative power of law was America's "peculiar institution" of chattel slavery. Human beings could be deemed "chattels" and, like any other property, bought and sold (and described under the commerce clause of the Constitution) only because legal institutions recognized property rights in human beings, and therefore acknowledged "owners" of them. As James M. McPherson has pointed out, the confiscation of "property" achieved by the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery without compensating the slaveowners, represents one of the great seizures of property in world history. It is not viewed as such only because few today sympathize with the claims of the "owners" who "lost" their "property" (unlike, say, the "victims" of expropriation by the Communist states in Eastern Europe following World War II). All of these quotation marks, of course, are a dead giveaway that each of these terms is now fully contestable and subject to political or moral argument.

What appears obvious to us about the ownership of persons, Sunstein argues, is true for any and all examples of "property" and, indeed, of social relations in general. Without the legal assignment of rights over objects, we literally could make no sense of the notion of property, or of much else. Thus "parents" are created, from this perspective, not by a "natural" biological process, but rather by the decision of state authorities to allocate rights of control over a child to particular individuals, a reality made crystal clear in custody struggles.

It follows, then, that the homeless might well complain "not only about the government's failure to provide them with shelter, but also about the range of civil and criminal laws that forbid them from using shelter that would be otherwise available." There might well be an ample stock of housing to provide shelter for all of the present homeless; but the state has delegated to private citizens the right to demand rents for the privilege of access to the housing. Yet it could be otherwise: the state could redescribe property rights to include a duty to grant access to persons who cannot afford to pay the rent. Such redescriptions have occurred in several states, for example, in regard to the meaning of owning a shopping center: owners can no longer refuse access to their property to people who have no interest in buying but want to circulate political petitions or hand out political pamphlets. And in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress simply removed from the traditional bundle of property rights the power of a restaurant owner to exclude persons from dining facilities on grounds of race.

For Sunstein, the post-New Deal state, with its rewriting of many traditional notions of property rights, represents the triumph of Hale and his fellow Realists. Although private property certainly survived the New Deal, its theoretical basis was far different from what it had been in the earlier era. No longer did "property" represent some prepolitical "natural" entitlement; it now represented a public policy judgment by the state that, overall, important social values would be realized by leaving certain controls in the hands of ordinary citizens. But experience could prove otherwise, and there would now be relatively little bar to reordering the elements of this control. Sometimes compensation would be constitutionally required. The Constitution, after all, specifically commands in the Fifth Amendment that no property be taken without just compensation, and judges are not, Sunstein argues, free to ignore this important piece of constitutional text. (Sunstein

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would almost certainly disallow uncompensated "access rights" of the homeless to unpaid-for housing.) More often, as a matter of practice, "regulation," like the Civil Rights Act, is found by courts not to be a "taking," and thus no compensation is extracted from the state.

Sunstein's theoretical apparatus is quite radical in its implications, but he goes out of his way to endorse, as a political matter, the wisdom of relying on private property and the market for most social decisions. In this respect he is most definitely a "new Democrat." The whole point, though, is that the allocation of property rights must be critically assessed and not simply accepted as the product of some "natural" process. This, Sunstein argues, is the lesson taught by the New Deal, which he celebrates and wants to emulate, even though the contemporary lessons he draws from it may be somewhat different from those taught by traditional celebrators of the New Deal and, for that matter, of the Warren Court, insofar as it is seen in part as exemplifying the heritage of the New Deal.

Early in his book Sunstein reveals his view that "the legacy of the Warren Court—the positions laid out by its defenders and detractors—is increasingly unhelpful to the resolution" of the questions that he defines as now central to the constitutional analyst. The denizens of the Warren Court are simply no longer founts of relevant wisdom. Sunstein, born in 1954, was in his early teens when Earl Warren resigned as chief justice. The obsession of his liberal elders with protecting the legacy of the Warren Court from the attacks of the political right is not Sunstein's concern. Thus he is quite unsympathetic with the quintessential Warren-era attempts, found most eloquently in the work of Frank Michelman and supported by some case law, to legitimize the judicial imposition on states of a duty to fund at least a minimal welfare state that would guarantee subsistence to all persons. For Sunstein, such arguments are more properly addressed to legislators and presidents, who have taken their own oaths to obey the Constitution, rather than to the judiciary, which is institutionally unsuited to direct such massive change.

Still, a great deal of Sunstein's own project is generated by the reality that, whether constitutionally mandated or not, the United States is indeed a welfare state of sorts, and the ever increasing role of the state in the distribution of goods, services and money raises sharply all of the questions about "partiality" and "impartiality" that Sunstein views as central to the constitutional enterprise. The American version of the welfare state is a surprisingly recent creation of the political order, with many of its constitutional problems still to be worked out.

Although the New Deal serves as Sunstein's inspiration because of its intellectual radicalism, it is important to realize that the welfare state is, politically, a significantly post-New Deal development. The New Deal state is best conceived as a "regulatory state," passing a variety of laws and establishing new agencies designed to elicit desired behavior by the citizenry. With the obvious exception of Social Security, relatively little of the classic New Deal legislation—the National Labor Relations Act, the Securities and Exchange Acts and so on—involved systematic redistribution of resources through "taxing and spending."

It was Lyndon Johnson and, to an astonishing degree, Richard Nixon who created the contemporary welfare state and its attendant constitutional complexities. The 1960s and '70s saw huge increases in federal spending on food, housing, education and other "entitlements" whose funding indeed required a high measure of direct redistribution through the aegis of government. In constant 1972 dollars, the federal non-defense budget went from $32.1 billion in 1960 to $60.9 billion in 1969 to

The Oral Tradition

Those who favor their left hands are interpreted
In the written tradition as those whose wires
Were crossed in the womb for reasons
Withheld from our limited understanding.
In the oral tradition they merely worked too hard
With their right hands in the life before
And in this life are allowed to rest them
Like a farmer letting a field lie fallow.
A little leisure for each to meditate
On the many chores still to be finished
Before the earth feels like heaven.

In the written tradition, there's room in heaven
For every deserving soul, but in the oral
The number of heavenly souls equals the number
Of wanderers allowed after forty years
To enter Canaan, a number so small
It means that if most people are saved now
Most have to share a soul with others.
And so the question arises about our soul mates:
Who will sit beside us at the feast
On our right hand or our left in the place
Where such distinctions no longer matter?

In the written tradition our arrival time
Depends on our achievement, on work and faith.
In the oral tradition it depends on our companions.
People no better than we are, assigned to a nimble group
That travels light, may be there already,
While you and I, if we're linked to laggards,
May have decades to go, or centuries.
No use blaming the world in general. The question is
Whether the moody, left-handed baker
Will be going with us, and how willingly.

And what about the Haitian bread man
Who looks uneasy three days out of five.
He must be wondering, if he has an inkling
Of the oral tradition, which of his customers
Are sharing the bus with him. And what proportion
Of these are smarter than the people of Nineveh
When it comes to telling their right hands from their left.

Carl Dennis

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$125 billion in 1978. When Kennedy became president, federal expenditures for health care totaled $147 million, less, I suspect, than the government now annually spends on Tylenol for Medicare patients.

Modern government, at the federal level and the state level, provides many benefits, and with this provision comes the question of "the power of our government to grant dollars, license or jobs on 'conditions' that might be thought to invade constitutional rights." Sunstein focuses much of his attention on this absolutely central question of the modern state. Both liberals and conservatives are tempted to offer state largess on condition that the recipients use the money in ways amenable to a given political agenda. Liberals have insisted that recipients of federal funds not engage in racial or gender discrimination; similarly, Congress has conditioned the receipt of federal highway funds on states adopting federally desired drinking ages for alcohol. Conservatives have been equally willing to condition funds: the most notorious examples are the so-called "gag rule" prohibiting recipients of certain federal monies from discussing abortion and limitations on the kind of art that can receive support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Several chapters of Sunstein's book wrestle with the tortuous questions of the degree to which a federal or state payer can demand certain tunes from receiving pipers. Sunstein is sharply critical of the efforts of scholars to devise a comprehensive theory of "unconstitutional conditions" that could serve almost algorithmically to resolve all of the various dilemmas presented by the modern welfare state. Instead he counsels careful attention to context and a more or less ad hoc balancing by judges of the social interests claimed by the state against the cost to important constitutional values of allowing the conditions to be enforced. He is suitably disapproving about recent attempts at cultural control by the NEA, but he sensibly cautions against any simple—indeed, inane—notion that the Endowment ought to be indifferent to questions of the quality of our culture and therefore should be indifferent to content in picking and choosing the kinds of art it (in the name of the taxpayers) wishes to subsidize. Assessing artistic quality, including the appropriateness on many occasions of the "message" of an artistic work, is precisely what we expect the Endowment to do, and it makes no sense to ask those doing the choosing to be "neutral" in their judgment.

What may well prove most controversial is Sunstein's discussion of "the meaning of freedom of speech in new areas involving advanced technologies, campaign finance regulation, government efforts to ensure quality and diversity on the airwaves, hate speech and pornography." For it is here that his earlier discussion of American Legal Realism comes home to roost with a vengeance. Recall the basic insight that there are no pre-political, "natural" assignments of rights, that everything is the result of politically contingent choices that are subject to being revised in light of new information. Recall also the insight that the constitutional legitimation of the New Deal required upholding the rights of Congress and state legislatures to make just such revisions in regard to traditional notions of property rights, limited only (if at all) by a requirement that Congress or the legislature come to a good-faith judgment that the public interest would be served by the revision in question.

What Sunstein accurately points out is that many of the rights we associate with the First Amendment—including, for example, the right of the editors of this magazine to exercise editorial choice in deciding whether or not to print this review—are in fact linked to classical allocations of control of property. Standard defenses of these allocations, even if they invoke the First Amendment, exemplify for Sunstein precisely the "status quo neutrality," the naturalizing (or, in the cliché of contemporary postmodernist theory, the privileging) of what should be perceived as in fact highly malleable assignments of control rights.

Why, for example, should THE NEW REPUBLIC have greater rights to exclude political malcontents from its property than the hapless owner of a shopping center in California or the trustees of Princeton University in New Jersey, who lost a case (in which I participated as a lawyer on the other side) concerning their right to use New Jersey's trespass law to prohibit uninvited strangers from passing out political handbills on Princeton's property? Why shouldn't Congress or the City Council of the District of Columbia (the equivalent of a state legislature) be able to decide that, all things considered, the public interest requires that THE NEW REPUBLIC grant access to those attacked in its pages or even simply to those who cannot otherwise afford to pay the costs necessary to publish a magazine? Antonia Cook, Clinton's nominee as head of the Federal Communications Commission, is said to support the reinstatement of "equal time" and "fairness" rules in regard to the electronic media. Yet few scholars retain any commitment

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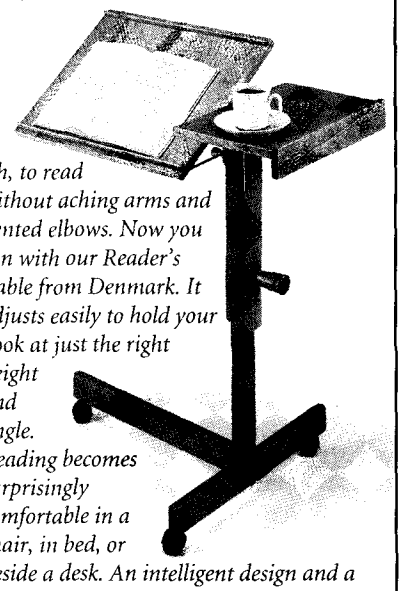

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to the exploded distinction between the classical print media and their electronic colleagues, and it is hard indeed to figure out the constitutionally relevant difference between CBS and THE NEW REPUBLIC. Many traditional scholars would use this reasoning to give the network all of the rights now enjoyed by THE NEW REPUBLIC. Sunstein, however, is quite willing to reverse the message.

Thus Sunstein forthrightly calls for "a New Deal for speech [that] would apply much of the reasoning of the New Deal attack on the common law to current questions of First Amendment law." The consequence of such a New Deal would be a realization "that many imaginable democratic interferences with the autonomy of broadcasters or newspapers are not 'abridgments' of free speech at all." Indeed, far more radically, Sunstein argues "that such autonomy, created and guaranteed as it is by law, may sometimes" be just the kind of "abridgment" of speech or of the press that the First Amendment prohibits. Similarly, Sunstein supports significant regulation of campaign spending and offers defenses of at least some anti-pornography and hate-speech ordinances.

There is a basic division in contemporary liberalism over the extent to which one regards these kinds of regulation as desirable or obnoxious, constitutionally tolerable or clearly unconstitutional. Whatever may have been the revulsion of most liberals to former President Bush's attacks on the ACLU, it should be clear that the anti-regulatory thrust of the ACLU, at least where speech is concerned, is under more vigorous attack from the left than the right, at least within the legal academy. Sunstein, one of the most notable left-liberals within the contemporary legal academy, clearly supports far more regulation of speech and the press than does the ACLU. He is far more likely to view legislation modifying the status quo in regard to control of the media as just another deliberative judgment by a legislature (or an executive agency like the FCC) about what the public interest demands.

Sunstein's universe is strikingly different ideologically from, say, Hugo Black's and William Douglas's. Their "absolutist" understandings of the First Amendment provided the scaffolding for an earlier, now aging and retiring, generation of liberals in their approach to regulation of speech and the press. For Black, "no law" meant "no law." For Sunstein, however, there is *always* law, and, consequently, there is *never* "no law." "In a regime of property rights," he writes, "there is no such thing as no regulation of speech; the question is what forms of regulation best serve the purposes of the free speech guarantee." And an active state should always be willing to reorder any assignment of legal rights and immunities in order to achieve these purposes, which for Sunstein amount to establishing the conditions that will generate a certain kind of public deliberation about the great issues of the day. It is a measure of contemporary ferment within the legal-academic left that one might well wonder what position the American Civil Liberties Union would take if the talented Sunstein is nominated, not at all implausibly, for a position in the federal judiciary.

SANFORD LEVINSON teaches at the University of Texas Law School and is the author of *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton University Press).

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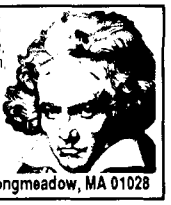

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TRB *continued from page 6*

timents and some immigration controls. Sounds coherent and powerful—but it's also nothing Clinton can't endorse. Indeed, he's already making "get tough" noises on immigration.

Clinton can only really be cornered when a powerful Democratic interest group—or an intensely held Democratic doctrine—prevents him from being flexible. He could never embrace a true "choice" plan to replace the public schools, because the teachers' unions wouldn't stand for it. But schools are mainly a local issue. Name a federal question where Clinton is similarly shackled. I can't.

This is the real significance of Clinton's much-publicized "shift" to the center. It's not so much that he is now positioned where most of the votes are (though he is). It is that he's now positioned where he can move to co-opt any particular conservative "culture" issue that threatens to catch on. He doesn't even have to spend a lot of energy convincing the lobbies on his party's left not to tie him down with unpopular demands. The gays-in-the-military controversy has demonstrated, to Clinton and the interest groups, the disastrous consequences of such a course. Not only will Clinton not embrace gay marriage—gay rights groups are in no position to insist that he do it.

Even health care reform, I think, won't threaten Clinton's re-election as long as he retains his flexibility by presenting his reforms as a practical trial, rather than as an ideological crusade against "unconscionable" price-gouging. If "managed competition" doesn't control costs, he might say, we'll try something else. On health care, the "center" wants simply to find something that works.

Sidney Blumenthal of *The New Yorker* criticizes Clinton's neo-centrism, arguing "there is no new, post-cold war consensus hiding just beneath the surface of public opinion, waiting to be fished out." The opposite view, suggested by analysts William Schneider and E.J. Dionne Jr., is that American voters have been pretty clear about what they want (e.g., an abortion compromise), but the ideologies of the two parties have somehow conspired to prevent them from getting it. I've long resisted the Schneider/Dionne thesis—it seems to encourage uninspired moderation, the "end of ideology" writ small. But it could still be right. And if it's right, the president who frees himself from his party's demands and seizes the middle ground is capable of dominating national politics for a long time. That's what Clinton is on the verge of doing.

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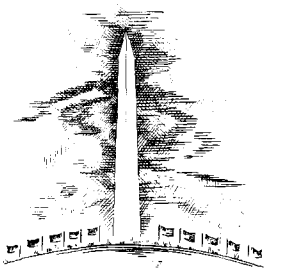
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Culture camp

"IT IS GOING TO BE IMPOSSIBLE TO defeat you in the Senate, because you have a way with words," Orrin Hatch told Sheldon Hackney during his confirmation hearings to head the National Endowment for the Humanities. Hatch was putting it mildly. Hackney's sins are not limited to his sophisms about the conflict between "openness and diversity" at the University of Pennsylvania. He should also be held accountable for defending speech codes a full year after the Supreme Court made clear that they are unconstitutional. When lower courts began to strike down the codes in 1990, Penn initially maintained that, as a private university, it was not bound by the First Amendment. Although legally undeniable, this position is morally embarrassing; and when Hackney was asked at a faculty meeting in 1991 whether students at Penn were to enjoy fewer First Amendment liberties than students at Penn State, he replied, indignantly, no. He then proceeded to draft a new code that the local chapter of the ACLU called "one of the worst" in the nation. If there were any lingering doubts about the legal status of speech codes, Antonin Scalia removed them a year ago in his sweeping *RAV* decision, which held that even unprotected speech, such as fighting words, cannot be regulated selectively. Like most other presidents of private universities, Hackney simply ignored the Court's view of the First Amendment. As late as April 28, he reaffirmed his position that the freedom of speech of minority groups is somehow abridged by the slurs of others. The words "confirmation conversion," therefore, came to mind when Hackney unexpectedly told the Senate that the Penn speech code "just doesn't work very well," although he hastened to add that the "procedures" should be allowed to run their course. The senators, who took no more notice of the *RAV* decision than Hackney did, failed to note the "procedures" are not only unwise but wildly unconstitutional. This tends to reinforce my hunch that the Court's real significance, increasingly, is academic rather than political.

AT THE GIDDY DAWN OF THE CLINton era, *The New York Times* detected a "seismic shift in the ethos of the capital . . . a younger, looser, hipper and more inclusive crowd than any since the heyday of the Kennedy administration." It is now clear that the *Times* was being hyperbolic; and that the gamin Clintonites are no "looser" than their Republican predecessors (if "loose" is defined as leaving your desk before 11 p.m.). But the best evidence of the immutably bland quality of life in the capital is the smattering of new restaurants that cater, very self-consciously, to those who crave attitude. In the past few months, a sad pizza joint around the corner from the office was converted into a campy beer hall called The Big Hunt, with 1950s safari posters, fake buffalo antlers on the wall sconces and green tarantula fuzz on the chandeliers. An Ethiopian dive on U Street became State of the Union, a Bolshevik canteen with huge murals copied from a book on Russian constructivism and Leninist flags hanging from trumpets above the bar. Across the street, workers are finishing the marquee of The Andalusian Dog, where three melting clocks, after Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*, are framed by the words that define surrealism, according to André Breton: AS BEAUTIFUL AS A CHANCE MEETING OF A SEWING MACHINE AND AN UMBRELLA ON A DISSECTING TABLE. I was on the verge of mistaking all this for a spontaneous eruption of Clintonian diversity when *The Washington Post* revealed last week that all three establishments are, in fact, designed and owned by the same person: a 32-year-old promoter named Joe Englert, who runs most of Washington's trendiest nightclubs as well. (Englert's creed: "You can convince people of anything if you repeat it enough.") Englert is the perfect emblem for Bill Clinton's Washington, in which cultural and political diversity are equally contrived, and both are choreographed by central planners.



THE SYNTHETIC SURREALISM OF Joe Englert seems even thinner after you've experienced the real thing. At the Roma Restaurant and Garden in Cleveland Park, all the animals on the wall were once alive. As you enter, a molting Bengal tiger and a grimy white polar bear lunge at you menacingly with outstretched paws. Mounted animal heads surround the room—zebra, water buffalo, moose and impala, and, above the bar, two maniacally snarling African baboons. All the animals were shot by Frank Abbo, who started the restaurant in the Harding era. (Mr. Abbo himself was killed in the '70s while crossing Connecticut Avenue after a haircut.) A black bear crouches on the upright piano; and a blind pianist named Genevieve sings popular arias from Verdi, as well as lighter selections such as "Funiculi, Funicula." After passing through the Venetian room, with its elaborately painted mural of the San Angelo prison, you reach the beautiful Roma garden. Lush grape vines climb the green wooden trellises that separate one table from another; and in the center of the garden a circular fountain—speckled by gold, purple and orange lights—is surrounded by aromatic mint plants. There is nothing self-conscious about Roma, from the monthly Kiwanis Club meetings to Mrs. Anna Abbo, Frank's widow, regally eating beef gelatin at a corner table. To my mind, it's the most stylish place in D.C.

THE WASHINGTON CITY Council recently debated a bill that would change the culture of the capital more radically than anything the Clinton administration could desire. To address complaints about noise and overcrowding, the bill would require group houses rented to five or more unrelated people to be licensed as boarding houses. For a generation of underpaid interns, couriers, public interest types and journalists, the group house has been Washington's most democratic social arrangement. I shared one with five people during my first summer in Washington after college, and still have friends whose living quarters are straight out of Balzac's *Père Goriot*. But the ascendancy of the group house over the boarding house is a fairly recent phenomenon in D.C. From the beginning of the Republic until the Civil War, most members of Congress and Supreme Court justices lived in boarding houses, paired off two to a room, according to party and region. ("Those who keep the Congressional boarders, even females, are a savage, fierce looking people," says an 1828 pamphlet at the Washington Historical Society.) Well after the turn of the century, resident proprietresses continued to provide common meals for boarders, who were often seated in order of social status. By 1917 six TNR associates, including Walter Lippmann and Felix Frankfurter, felt communal enough to start one of Washington's first group houses, "The House of Truth." The resurrection of formal boarding houses, with their morass of regulations governing the number of people in the beds, food in the bedrooms and other petty tyrannies, would revive one of the capital's most oppressive traditions. Compulsory meals, presumably, would follow, and Joe Englert would try to cater them with spiders.

JEFFREY ROSEN

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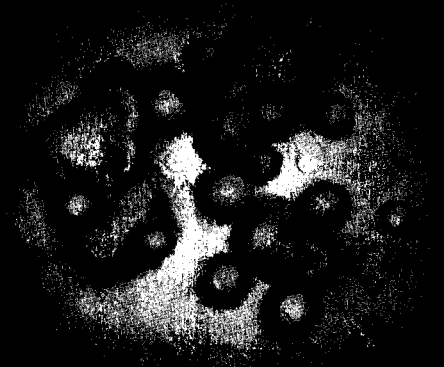
The Big Bad Wolf

The Wicked Witch

The Thing Under the Bed



The Measles

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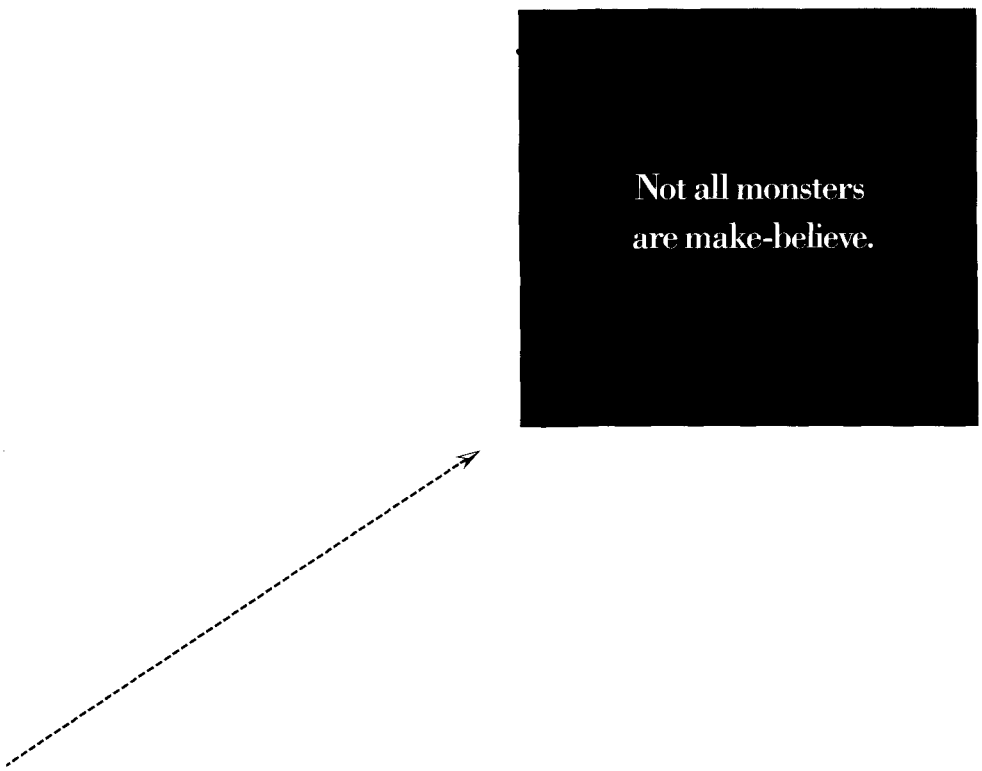

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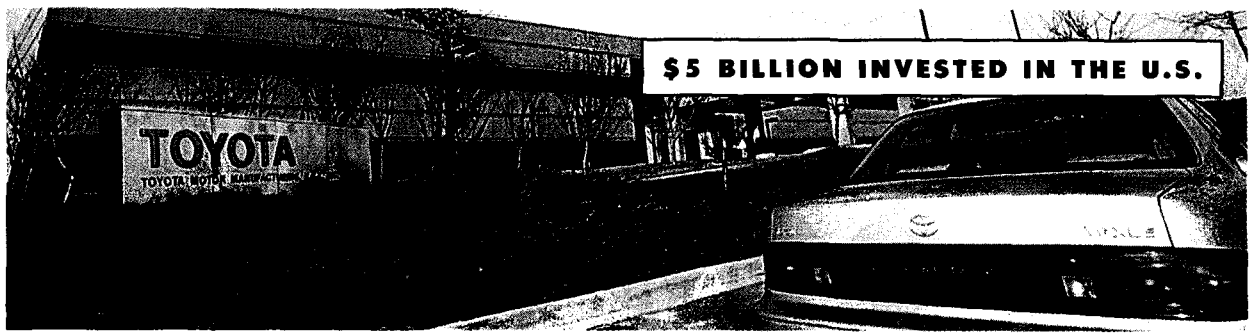
ECONOMY



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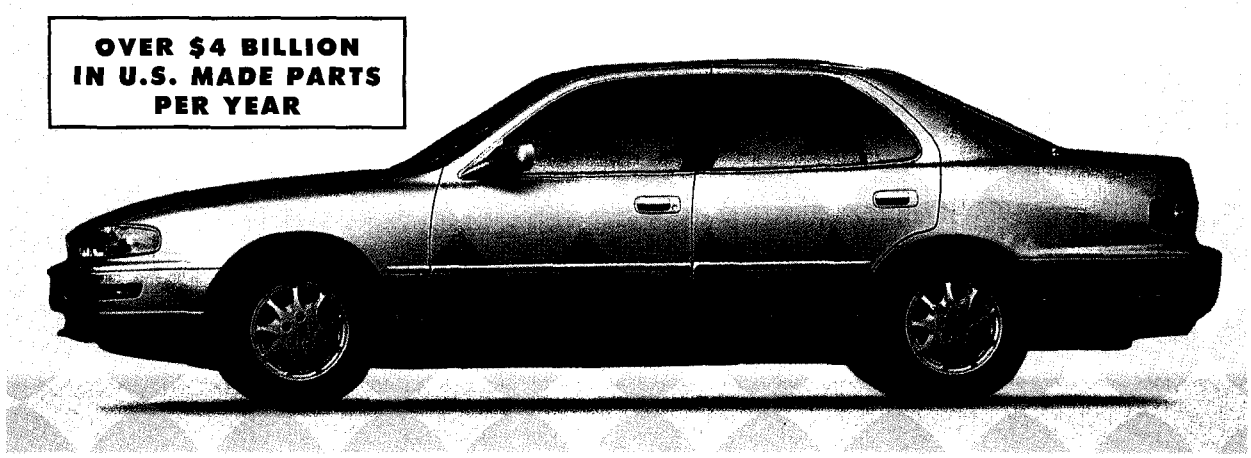

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